

# THE POLITICS OF CHOICE AND ECONOMIC DISTRIBUTIONS

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## PREFACE

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

This thesis would not exist without the care, support, and encouragement of many others. I am very grateful to my supervisors, Clare Chambers and Tom Dougherty, who were a wonderful team; they encouraged me to follow my political interests and greeted the results with patience and thoughtful critique. Many thanks to Maxime Lepoutre for helping to untangle the problems of this thesis over frequent lunches and cups of tea; he was the perfect political-philosophical partner-in-crime. Special thanks also to Rob Deakin and Liam Crosby for endless encouragement and insightful comments. Thanks to audiences at the Cambridge Political Philosophy Workshop – Jens Van ‘t Klooster, John Filling, Nakul Krishna, Paul Sagar, and many others – for incisive feedback. My arguments are far stronger for discussions with attendees of a MANCEPT workshop on equality and responsibility. The Cambridge ‘Minorities and Philosophy’ Society and the Cambridge ‘Gender and Working Lives’ Reading Group proved vital sources of camaraderie and inspiration.

My family have been extremely supportive, encouraging me, feeding me delicious food, and teasing me out of various lows; JK, especially, was a wonderfully calm and unfailingly kind housemate. This thesis would not exist without Rob. He was a remarkably open-minded sounding board, a bottomless source of debate and ideas, and, always, a soft place to land when things went wrong; I am so very grateful to him for that.



# THE POLITICS OF CHOICE & ECONOMIC DISTRIBUTIONS

## JESSICA KAPLAN

**Abstract:** This thesis asks how egalitarians can theorise economic-distributive issues in ways sensitive to structural injustices of race, gender, and class. Drawing on real-world political problems and debates, I illustrate the contemporary urgency of an intersectional approach to economic-distributive justice. And I argue that any such approach must adopt repoliticised, critical conceptions of choice and the economy.

Political philosophy on distributive justice is dominated by theories centrally animated by the concept of choice. These theories, I argue, risk mistakenly sweeping structural injustices under the carpet of victims' own 'bad choices'. To diagnose this problematic tendency, I reveal the hidden ethico-political dimensions of attributing certain outcomes to certain choices. Choice, I show, cannot provide a pre-political foundation for theories of distributive justice. Accordingly, I then turn to prominent egalitarian paradigms not centrally animated by choice. I suggest relational egalitarianism fares better for its less individualist, more social-structuralist approach. But relational egalitarians are not always clear about how economic-distributive issues relate to equal political relationships and socio-political status hierarchies. I argue that this sometimes leads them to understate the importance of distributive justice.

Nancy Fraser's 'perspectival dualism' looks a promising corrective to this under-emphasis, as it is designed to integrate left economic-redistributive projects with feminist and anti-racist cultural-recognitive projects. However, I argue that Fraser's underlying economy-culture dualism means she struggles to capture important features of the intersections of race, class, and gender. Tracing this problematic economy-culture dualism through contemporary 'class versus identity politics' debates, I propose an alternative approach. I suggest we be non-dualists, viewing economic distributions and cultural representations as importantly co-constitutive.

To end, I outline a non-dualist analysis of the economy. Our dominant understanding of the economy, I argue, is an ideological objectification of certain practices – an objectification which harmfully helps naturalise relations of raced, classed, and gendered domination. I suggest a counter-hegemonic understanding informed by anti-racist, feminist, and socialist rethinkings of which practices constitute labour and who constitutes the 'public' within economic imaginaries of public value.



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The motivation for this thesis arose from certain political experiences I had and the tensions and gaps that they revealed in my political-theoretical framework. My first job out of university was in a community centre two minutes' walk from the base of Grenfell Tower. I was hired to support long-term unemployed people from the area – one of the poorest in the UK and extremely ethnically diverse<sup>1</sup> – to help them find work or training. Fresh out of a Philosophy Masters, I was often struck by how utterly unhelpful my political-philosophical tools seemed for analysing the grinding unfairness this community was accustomed to: living on wages too low to stretch to a bus fare; losing jobs with each wobble and dip of the economy; providing ongoing unpaid care to family and friends while being berated by state agencies for their lack of formal work; navigating an increasingly sparse and incredibly complex benefits regime; and trying to access basic public services – including housing support and mental and physical healthcare systems – which no longer had the capacity to help them.

The Grenfell Tower fire forced us all to reckon with how class and race still so powerfully determine whose lives are worthy of protection, sustenance, and 'grievability.'<sup>2</sup> This community – like many others around the country – has been deemed less worthy of these goods for decades, creating the conditions for the catastrophic fire as well as for many more invisible, personal catastrophes over the

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<sup>1</sup> Barr (2017).

<sup>2</sup> Butler (2012: 148).

years. The experiences of that job made concrete what, up until then, I had mostly only known in theory: that racism, sexism, and classism were alive and well in the UK, and that progress on these fronts could be lost as well as gained.<sup>3</sup>

My next job required that I start every day by reading all the major national newspapers, from the Sun and Daily Mail to the Times and Guardian.<sup>4</sup> A few years of this routine transposed over my experience at the community centre convinced me that contemporary racism, sexism, and classism were increasingly hidden under a justificatory veneer directing political attention to individuals' choices. Over and over, these papers decried the choices and actions of lazy, greedy, or reckless individuals, and the resulting damage these people did to the nation through their endangering and draining of economic resources.

Predictable repetitions within these stories suggested that these reckless, lazy individuals were being presented as *architypes* of various social groups.<sup>5</sup> Favourite (overlapping) architypes include 'benefits cheats' and 'chavs' – who, in these news stories, come to represent working class people, especially single working-class mothers – and 'illegal immigrants' and 'bogus asylum seekers' – coming to represent migrants. As Imogen Tyler argues, these archetypical 'national abjects' are mobilized as technologies of social control, deployed to generate consent for the steady erosion of the UK's welfare state.<sup>6</sup> The figurations of these groups serve to naturalise and legitimate the poverty of some of the most socially and economically disadvantaged people. The threat these groups apparently posed was very often portrayed as

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<sup>3</sup> I worked here during the aftermath of the 2008 recession, when the first round of Conservative cuts to public spending and services were taking effect.

<sup>4</sup> I was a press officer.

<sup>5</sup> For example, headlines labelled Mike Philpott, who murdered his children, as a 'Vile Product of Welfare UK' (Dolan & Bentley 2013) and the 'perfect parable', illustrating the 'pervasiveness of evil born out of welfare dependency' (Wilson 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Tyler (2013)

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economic: as the cheating of money, jobs, and housing from honest, hardworking British families.<sup>7</sup>

I had read political philosophy on individual choice and distributive justice, but much of it theorised the moral significance of choice from an idealised, initially equal baseline. The significance of such work for understanding the profoundly unequal real world remained entirely opaque to me. Much of the feminist political philosophy I had read focused on the ‘public/private’ distinction.<sup>8</sup> Since women have increasingly entered the formal workforce, the contemporary significance of these debates also remained unclear to me.

Of course, I was late to the party: political argument had appealed to individual choice and ‘the economy’ for decades. But these years were the heyday of neoliberalism, when politics seemed to revolve around these concepts with ever-increasing fervour. Now, living through what look to be significant ruptures of this neoliberal paradigm, it is helpful to take stock of why and how the concepts of choice and the economy function as they do, and to investigate how their centrality might have contributed to and shaped our current political moment. Ruptures in political paradigms are good times to take stock and consider alternatives.

To these ends, in this thesis I explore how the concepts of choice and the economy interact with our dominant political conception of personhood, our sense of what we owe each other, and our perception of whose lives and labours count as valuable. I examine how dominant political-philosophical approaches to economic-distributive

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<sup>7</sup> E.g. Riley (2018, 2019); Dathan (2016); Slack (2012). Public perception of how much money was lost to benefit fraud was 34 times higher than the reality – see Sacks-Jones (2014). For an overview of news reporting on migrants, see Greenslade (2016). For analysis of public and news discourses around working class mothers, see Tyler (2008).

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Okin (1989). Pateman (1983: 281) argues that ‘the dichotomy between the private and the public is central to almost two centuries of feminist writing and political struggle; it is, ultimately, what the feminist movement is about.’

justice have confronted or failed to confront these issues. And I consider how an egalitarianism which takes the elimination of structural injustices like those of race, gender, and class as a primary aim might approach these issues differently.

### *Argument Outline:*

I present an egalitarian case for repoliticised, critical understandings of the concepts of choice and the economy. I propose a de-centring of choice and a counter-hegemonic understanding of 'the economy.' The first part of the thesis focuses on the concept of choice. The second part draws on my arguments about the politics of choice and responsible agency to explore how economic distributions co-constitute cultural, 'recognitive' understandings and identities. My argument goes as follows:

Chapter 2 sets the political and philosophical scene, explaining why the concept of choice warrants critical egalitarian attention. I suggest that choice is central to our dominant political conception of agents, and I introduce the importance of social context in assessing the values and costs of choice. I argue that in our current inequalitarian social context, political discourse about the importance and value of choice works to perpetuate and reinforce structural inequalities. The instrumental and representative *costs* of choice – the costly results choices can bring and the negative things those results are taken to show about us – systematically fall to oppressed groups due to harmful social norms and unequal access to sources of social and material wellbeing. Dominant political narratives then excuse the resulting injustices by appeal to our symbolic formal equality as active choosers.

Chapter 2 aims to deromanticize 'choice' in order to help balance a discipline much enamoured with the power and moral significance of the concept. Taking my cue from feminist and post-structuralist work on choice and agency, I aim to widen their

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net.<sup>9</sup> I show how idealised choice narratives obscure race and class injustices (as well as gendered ones) and illustrate these narratives' importance to economic-distributive matters. To do this, I introduce the concept of 'responsibilisation': the political practice of holding individuals normatively and practically responsible for their own survival and wellbeing and attributing any failures to individual bad choices and character, rather than to structural injustice.<sup>10</sup> The idea of responsibilisation runs through the whole thesis.

In inegalitarian contexts, then, political emphasis on the value of choice can help reinforce structural injustices of race, gender, and class. Given this, Chapters 3-6 ask: first, how the concept of choice allows for such problematic results; and second, whether there are ways egalitarians can use the concept without risking sweeping structural injustices under the carpet of victims' own agency? I argue that egalitarians *can* still use the concept if they wish but that they must draw on it in careful and critical ways, and I suggest how this is possible.

To make my argument, I analyse the philosophical term of art, 'agent responsibility', since it is the most prominent philosophical attempt to systematically unpack and carefully articulate the fuzzy concept of 'choice.' In Chapter 3, I introduce the concept and outline standard political philosophical theorisations of how to determine who is agent responsible for what. I focus on one standard model of agent responsibility which states that agent  $x$  chooses outcome  $y$  if and only if  $x$ 's intentional actions were causally responsible for  $y$  and  $x$  could reasonably have foreseen that  $y$  would follow from  $x$ .

I explore how responsibility-sensitive egalitarians – who give this concept pride of place in their theories of distributive justice – tend to handle structural injustices (or

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<sup>9</sup> E.g. Bartky (1988); Chambers (2010); Lépinard (2011); Foucault (2012b).

<sup>10</sup> I adapt this understanding of responsibilisation from Rose (1996) and Brown (2016: 4).

avoid handling them, as is often the case). I suggest that race-, gender-, and class-neutral analyses of exactly who is agent responsible for what are not as straightforward as they first appear. Certainly, the standard model of agent responsibility looks ill-equipped to provide such analyses and cannot be remedied by any shallow, quick fix.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore what deeper reforms to this standard model are necessary in order to understand how and why we attribute responsibility in the ways that we do, and how to adjudicate debates involving conflicting authorship attributions. These chapters focus on three cases: choices leading up to sexual assault, choices to perform unpaid carework, and choices determining the distribution of housing.<sup>11</sup>

In Chapter 4, I identify three indeterminacies in the standard model and outline how we unthinkingly resolve these indeterminacies when we make intuitive agent responsibility attributions – as we so often do. First, I show that instinctive judgements about what agents capable of agent responsibility exist within the political sphere rely on a common-sense ‘political ontology.’ I explain why egalitarian political philosophers can and should challenge the dominant individualist ontology at work in both neoliberal political discourse and much responsibility-sensitive egalitarian thought.

Second, I explain how agent responsibility’s causal requirement functions, linking it to the concept of ‘actual causation.’ Striking a match, for example, counts as an actual cause of a fire, whereas the presence of oxygen is normally consigned to a mere background enabling condition – causally necessary, of course, but nonetheless not a proper *cause*. Drawing on philosophical accounts of actual causation I suggest

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<sup>11</sup> Though not obviously an issue of distributive justice, I use the case of sexual assault because feminists have done an excellent job of politicising the sexist focus on women’s choices in this context; I re-work these arguments to show their potential application to more traditionally ‘distributive’ issues like unpaid carework and housing.



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that this is because ‘the presence of oxygen’ will be a useless answer to the question, ‘what caused the fire?’ in all but very limited circumstances; to give it therefore impermissibly draws attention to causal background that simply does not matter for almost all purposes.

Philosophical and empirical work suggests that judgements of actual causation are informed by prescriptive and statistical norms; in other words, our instinctive views on which actions are actual causes and which merely background enabling conditions are informed by common-sense ideas about which actions ought/ought not to result in which outcomes, and about how often a certain action precedes a certain outcome.

In cases of sexual assault, for example, the victim’s actions of wearing provocative clothing or drinking alcohol are often deemed actual causes of assaults because these actions are deemed ones that *matter* to the production of assault outcomes. Common-sense suggests either that these actions often precede assault, or that women ought to avoid these actions, or both.

In turn, judgements of actual causation guide our common-sense agent responsibility attributions. For example, the standard model of agent responsibility (and many public discussions of assault) implies that victims who knowingly undertake these ‘risky’ behaviours co-author the assault outcome to some degree. And common-sense judgements of actual causation are similarly at work in attributions of agent responsibility for homelessness and poverty arising from doing unpaid carework.

Importantly, I do not endorse the common-sense responsibility attributions that I explain in Chapter 4; I attempt to clarify their basis in order to challenge them. Just as there are good reasons for egalitarians to challenge our dominant individualist

political ontology, in Chapter 5 I show that there are good reasons for us to challenge dominant maps of actual causation too. These maps enshrine sexist, conservative, and neoliberal norms that egalitarians need not and should not accept.

Instead I argue that egalitarians should replace the common-sense judgements underlying agent responsibility ascriptions with egalitarian ‘good sense’ judgements. We can do this because the concept of actual causation functions as it does in order to single out what matters for normal purposes. And what matters for the normal purposes of normative political debates – about how our society should function, what public services are justified, and how we collectively ought to understand and value social activities, for example – are the *right prescriptive norms*, not common-sense prescriptive norms nor current statistical norms.

For example, drawing attention to a woman’s choice to drink alone as an actual cause of assault impermissibly draws our attention to the wrong thing; her actions should be understood as mere causal background, not an actual cause of any sexual assault. It is the correct prescriptive norm that matters in this case, and this states that assault ought not follow from drinking alone while female. Our victim is not obligated to avoid sexual violence at the cost of her basic liberties; rather, her political community are collectively obligated to protect her basic liberties and safety, and everyone in this community is obligated not to commit assault. Therefore, I argue, our woman is not ‘agent responsible’ – she did not ‘co-author’ any assault.

Extending this analysis to the cases of unpaid carework and homelessness, I show how political appeals to responsibility attributions rest on the *conclusions* to paradigmatic ethico-political debates. In particular, they rest on debates about what political obligations we hold to one another, and how to classify the political-economic value of various social activities and practices. Choice cannot serve as an

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apolitical foundation on which to build theories of distributive justice since normative political judgements play an essential role in responsibility attributions used in this context.

Together, Chapters 3-5 tie arguments about causation from the philosophy of social science to feminist and socialist political theory. And they bring insights from traditional feminist arguments to bear on the neoliberal responsibilisation of access to public goods like housing. In the process, I explain how and why the concepts of 'choice' and 'agent responsibility' are able to play such central and persuasive roles in inegalitarian and conservative political thought. I also outline how issues of epistemic justice and ideology are entwined with the puzzle of who chooses what outcomes, suggesting that theorists of distributive justice must take these topics seriously.

In Chapter 6, I suggest we need to look beyond responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism for the theoretical tools necessary for an approach to distributive justice that aims to eliminate structural injustices. Responsibility-sensitive approaches tend to be so centrally animated by the concept of choice that they seldom develop other conceptual apparatuses more useful for discussing the underlying normative debates upon which judgements of 'choice' rest.

Accordingly, I then turn to theorisations of economic-distributive justice not centrally animated by choice. I first look to responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism's main theoretical competitor: relational egalitarianism. I argue that one of the best-known and most widely read elaborations of relational egalitarianism – Elizabeth Anderson's earlier work – is not always clear about how economic distributions relate to equal political relationships or socio-political status hierarchies. I trace parts of Anderson's framing of this issue back to Nancy Fraser's influential 'perspectival

dualism’ – a theory of how to understand and integrate left economic-redistributive projects with feminist and anti-racist cultural ‘recognitive’ projects.

Perspectival dualism looks extremely promising: it is framed around the need to combat racism, sexism, and classism, it takes its cue from real-world political problems, and it explicitly theorises the political role and significance of the economic-distributive realm. And it cautions against theorising economic-distributive justice in complete isolation from theorisations of cultural-recognitive justice. Furthermore, Fraser shaped perspectival dualism in response to accusations that the left has sidelined concerns about economic inequality and class in favour of putting ‘identity politics’ centre-stage; in the wake of popular votes for Brexit and Trump, such accusations have again become popular. She argues that the left must find a way to theorise *both* recognitive ‘identity’ issues and economic-distributive issues. Fraser’s theory therefore looks helpful for our current political moment.

However, in Chapter 7 I argue that perspectival dualism is not the best way to theorise economic-distributive issues. I do so by focusing on raced distributions, and by showing how perspectival dualism struggles to capture certain important features of the intersection of race and class. Here I return to the concept of responsibilisation, discussing how racist cultural representations claim to explain raced economic distributions by attributing them to the bad choices or character of people of colour. In turn, I argue, these racist representations help reproduce the systematic exclusion of people of colour from the economic goods, services, and opportunities enjoyed by their white counterparts. In this way, ideas of choice/responsible agency mediate the relationships between distributions and representations.

In Chapter 8, I look to Jodi Dean’s recent restaging of the ‘class vs identity politics’ debate. Dean is a prominent political commentator and a leading left political

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theorist.<sup>12</sup> I analyse the economy-culture dualism underlying Dean's position and argue that Dean's work suffers from similar problems to Perspectival Dualism. Building on lessons learned from Fraser and Dean, I propose we be 'non-dualists' instead, viewing economic distributions and cultural representations as importantly co-constitutive.

I call for this move away from economy-culture dualism because distributions of economic goods like wealth and secure housing importantly affect and are affected by dominant recognitive understandings of women, racialised groups, and the working classes. The Grenfell community lived and understood this well before the fire forced others to acknowledge it. And, as Tilley and Shilliam remark, 'the residential conditions of Grenfell Tower are broadly representative of a global reality in which the racialised "Others of Europe" remain largely impoverished, spatially marginalised and excluded from dignified housing.'<sup>13</sup> Insisting on the co-constitution of economic distributions and raced 'recognition', I argue, best helps us theorise why and how these contemporary racialised distributions are reproduced.

However, if we cannot understand the economic-distributive through a dualist contrast with the cultural-recognitive, how are we to understand the economy? To answer this, I propose a non-dualist analysis of the economy. I start by suggesting that the term picks out and groups together certain social practices and then objectifies this group as a thing, 'the economy'. More specifically, I argue that our dominant understanding of the economy is an ideological objectification of certain practices – an objectification which harmfully helps naturalise relations of raced, classed and gendered domination. It does this through the logic it uses to draw the line between the economy and the non-economic: by overvaluing certain labour

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<sup>12</sup> See, e.g. Jodi Dean (2016b). Jonathan Dean (2015) discusses Jodi Dean's position within contemporary political theory. Thousands of people attended Dean's recent 'Mark Fisher Memorial Lecture' (Barnett 2019).

<sup>13</sup> Tilley & Shilliam (2017: 1–2)

practices while undervaluing or ignoring others, and by drawing on calculations of public value that overvalue the interests of certain populations while excluding or minimising the interests of other exploited, excluded, and oppressed groups.<sup>14</sup>

In Chapter 2 I outline the centrality of choice to our dominant political conception of agents; in Chapter 8 I build on this by suggesting that the mould of homo-economicus has deeply shaped our conception of respectable or ‘proper’ human agents. I connect this to the dehumanisation and violence suffered by groups excluded from full economic participation because of their gender, race, class, or nationality.

Building on insights from social reproduction theory, I suggest the possibility of a counter-hegemonic understanding of the economy – one which focuses on the practices and resources important to the production and distribution of the means of life (shifting away from a focus on those practices important to the production and distribution of financial value). This understanding, I argue, must be informed by anti-racist, feminist, and socialist rethinkings of which practices constitute labour and who constitutes the ‘public’ within economic imaginaries of public value. I end by considering the implications of this critical redrawing of the economy for relational egalitarianism.

### *Main Claims of the Thesis:*

1. Egalitarians should re-politicise the concept of choice (and its philosophical counterpart, ‘agent responsibility’) and decentre it from their approaches to distributive justice.

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<sup>14</sup> By ‘our’ I mean Euro-Atlantic political communities, though the thesis draws primarily on data and examples from the UK and the USA.

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2. Choice and responsible agency importantly mediate the co-constitutive relationship between distributions and representations (including 'identity' categories).
3. The economy should not be separated from 'culture', but rather understood as an objectification of certain practices – which always have a cultural dimension – commonly picked out according to certain ideological logics.

### *A Note on Methodology:*

This thesis attempts to put political philosophers and critical theorists in conversation. Though political philosophy can sometimes seem either irrelevant to real world politics or overly friendly to co-option by inegalitarian public political conversations, neither of these need be the case. To the contrary, I believe there is much work within the discipline useful both for understanding our current political moment and thinking through how we might try to change it.

As already hinted at, however, I do view political philosophy's prevailing methodology of 'ideal theory' as potentially problematic. Loosely, ideal theories are theories constructed under idealised assumptions – assumptions which render social reality simpler and better than it actually is.<sup>15</sup> Chapters 2-5 can be read as a case study illustrating the potential pitfalls of this methodology; they aim to show how and why much ideal theorising about choice can be not simply uninformative regarding real world political problems, but harmfully obfuscatory.<sup>16</sup> Motivated by this, the thesis attempts to steer clear of ideal theory's methodology, keeping my philosophical feet firmly 'in the mud', as Ingrid Robeyns puts it.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> I take this definition from Valentini (2009: 332); see also Mills (2005: 168).

<sup>16</sup> I say 'potentially' because an argument that ideal theory, tout court, is problematic, is far beyond the scope of this thesis. I make the more limited claim (over Chapters 2-4) that dominant modes of ideal theorising about choice and distributive justice are problematic.

<sup>17</sup> Robeyns (2018)

Nor am I alone in this. Non-ideal theory continues to gain prominence within political philosophy (though to a lesser degree within the fairly traditional topic of distributive justice, perhaps).<sup>18</sup> Non-ideal theorists are characterised by the belief that the ‘natural and most illuminating starting point is the actual conditions’ of women, people of colour, and the working class – a starting point which makes ‘theoretically central the existence and functioning of the actual *non*-ideal structures.’<sup>19</sup>

Understood in this way, non-ideal political philosophy has important commonalities with critical theory. For example, Amy Allen suggests that what distinguishes critical theory from ‘mere normative philosophy’ is the inclusion of an ‘explanatory-diagnostic’ dimension – an attempt to observe and analyse the workings, contradictions, and limitations of existing social systems – alongside its ‘anticipatory-utopian’ dimension.<sup>20</sup>

Feminists are almost always non-ideal theorists, given that they start from the all too real problems of gender inequality. Unsurprisingly, then, many of the theoretical tools, arguments, interests, and approaches of this thesis are inspired by feminist work of one kind or another, whether it be feminist political economy, political sociology, metaphysics, political philosophy, critical theory, black feminist work on intersectionality (and its intellectual legacy), or socialist feminist thought.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Some prominent examples of non-ideal theorising from within political philosophy include the work of Elizabeth Anderson (1999, 2004b, 2010, 2019), work on epistemic injustice – e.g. Fricker (2007) – work on the social metaphysics of race and gender – e.g. Haslanger (2012e) – and feminist work on agency – e.g. Chambers (2010); Mackenzie and Stoljar (2000). Examples of non-ideal theorising about distributive justice include Anderson (2010); Gosseries (2005); O’Neill (2017); O’Neill and White (2019).

<sup>19</sup> Mills (2005: 170).

<sup>20</sup> Allen (2015: 514).

<sup>21</sup> E.g. Folbre (1991, 1994, 1995); Skeggs (2003, 2014, 2019); Haslanger (2017, 2012f); Chambers (2010); Bartky (1988); Fraser (2003); Carby (1982); Combahee River Collective (2005); Federici (2012); Bhattacharyya (2018), Camfield (2016), and Fraser *et al.* (2018).



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So, non-ideal theory starts with its feet in the mud. Because of this, it often has an epistemic dimension: it recognises that our theoretical tools arise from an ‘intellectual realm dominated by concepts, assumptions, norms, values, and framing perspectives’ that reflect the experiences and interests of the privileged.<sup>22</sup> Here, too, it shares important ground with critical theory since, as Raymond Geuss puts it, ‘the heart of the critical theory of society is its criticism of ideology.’<sup>23</sup> Critical theory so often involves ideology critique because proponents understand their theorising to be always bound up with the social context within which it is formulated; they therefore try to be self-conscious about, and critical of, how unjust social contexts might inform our theories, concepts, narratives, and attitudes.

Just as I try to avoid idealising away political injustices, I also attempt to explore how our theoretical tools are shaped by unequal power relations; this approach informs my critical examination of the concepts of choice and the economy. I aim the arguments of this thesis at egalitarian political philosophers interested in their discipline’s relationship with (and application to) real world political inequalities, especially those of race, gender, and class.

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<sup>22</sup> Mills (2005: 175). Cf. Swift (2008: 369) who defends the contribution of “‘pure”, context-independent philosophy.’

<sup>23</sup> Geuss (1981: 3).

## 2. THE COSTS OF CHOICE

### 2.1. Introduction

Choice holds pride of place within much liberal political philosophy. John Rawls, the patriarch of contemporary political philosophy, is often interpreted as prioritising people's ability to self-direct their lives through choice above much else.<sup>24</sup> Still, 'responsibility-sensitive egalitarians' think Rawls did not go far enough to enshrine the significance of choice; they think the distinction between chosen and unchosen inequalities constitutes the very core of distributive justice.<sup>25</sup> Libertarians likewise

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<sup>24</sup> See Chambers (2010: 117); G. Dworkin (1982: 48–49); Kymlicka (2002: 74). Rawls' communitarian critics take issue with the idea that 'our conceptions of the good carry weight... simply in virtue of our having chosen them' (Sandel 1992: 20); to this Rawls (1985: 243–244) replies that what is most morally weighty is rather our capacity to *assume responsibility* for our life choices.

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., Knight and Stemplowska (2011b). Or Vallentyne (2008: 62), who writes that, 'choices are the basic object of normative assessment.' It is possible for responsibility-sensitive egalitarians (or 'luck egalitarians') to build their theory around the aim of nullifying luck rather than a belief in the importance of choice. But many luck egalitarians' anti-luckism goes 'hand in hand' with their 'pro-choicism' (I take these terms from Stemplowska (2012: 390) who characterises pro-choicism as one of luck egalitarianism's three core elements (2012: 389)). Stemplowska (2012: 392) suggests one reason these aspects often go hand in hand: understanding luck as 'simply the inverse correlate of choice' helps sidestep the deep difficulties otherwise faced in satisfactorily defining luck. I interpret both Cohen and Dworkin as adopting this complementary pro-choicist and anti-luckist approach, for example. Though Cohen sometimes emphasises luck above choice (e.g. 1989: 931), his theory invokes the concept of 'genuine choice' at a key juncture (1989: 934), he advocates a 'proper insistence on the centrality of choice' (1989: 933) and he praises Dworkin for performing the 'considerable service of incorporating within [egalitarianism] the most powerful idea in the arsenal of the anti-egalitarian right: the idea of choice and responsibility' (1989: 933). Cohen treats choice as the inverse correlate of luck (1989: 907–908). Dworkin is similarly both pro-choicist and anti-luck: he writes that his theory is animated by two fundamental principles, first that people's fates are not dictated by brute luck and, second, that their fates are 'sensitive to the choices they have made' (Dworkin 2002: 6). He too treats luck as the inverse correlate of choice (e.g. Dworkin 2002: 287). Though Dworkin and Cohen put choice at the heart of their distributive theories, neither draws

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put choice at the heart of politics, though they disregard the responsibility-sensitive egalitarian insistence on equal starting points; Robert Nozick's mantra reads, 'From each as they choose, to each as they are chosen.'<sup>26</sup> The central importance of choice is often assumed in political philosophy but, within this context, Thomas Scanlon provides perhaps the best known attempt to articulate exactly why choice is so valuable and important.<sup>27</sup>

I do not argue that choice has no value or moral significance. To the contrary, I believe it has both, though I do not discuss this here. Instead, I am interested in what becomes visible if we focus on the current costs of choice, how these costs interact with one another, and who tends to bear them. But I do not attempt some kind of abstract cost-benefit analysis; I focus on just a few cases in an attempt to explore the pitfalls of using our current understandings and practices of choice as a proxy for autonomy. I suspect that egalitarians cannot do without robust conceptualisations of agency and autonomy, but I argue that our currently dominant practices and understandings of choice are profoundly ill-suited to this role.<sup>28</sup>

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on Scanlon's value of choice account to justify this. Accordingly, this chapter is not a direct attack on their luck egalitarianism (though chapters 3-6 build on this exploratory work to argue that egalitarians have good reason to promote different 'choice practices' than the ones highlighted here). Cohen spends little time exploring why choice ought to have pride of place in egalitarianism. Dworkin does touch on this: he suggests the distinction between choice and circumstance is 'essential' to first person ethics and therefore must be to political philosophy too (2002: 323), and that 'each person has a special responsibility for his own life, a responsibility that includes deciding what kind of life is appropriate to him' (2002: 324). But a full analysis of the value and importance of choice is never Dworkin's focus; perhaps as a result, his account remains partial and less convincing than Scanlon's (for criticism of Dworkin on this point see Armstrong 2005: 467-470).

<sup>26</sup> Nozick (1974: 160).

<sup>27</sup> Scanlon (2000: Ch.6; 2013b).

<sup>28</sup> I am persuaded by Allen (2011: 45) that, 'to be truly critical, to articulate the struggles and wishes of our age, critical theory must analyse power relations in all their depth and complexity, including the role they play in constituting modes of subjectivity, but it must do so without undermining or giving up on the possibility of theorising the subject's capacities for critical reflection and self-transformation.'

We have serious reason to worry about how the values and costs of choice are currently distributed. To illustrate this, I discuss how choice within contexts marked by unjust norms, practices and material conditions can serve to reproduce and perpetuate these injustices. Yet our currently dominant conceptualisation of what it means to be a political agent attaches profound importance to our symbolic equality as choosers; to remove someone's 'free choice' in the marketplace of ideas, values, and goods is to deeply disrespect their equal standing. Worse, the representative function of choice helps cast oppressed groups as either defective or naturally suited to their marginalised positions. These functions of choice thus work together to naturalise and cement serious inequalities, resulting in a harmful politics of 'responsibilisation' – a politics that sweeps serious structural injustices under the rug of 'failures of personal choice and character.'<sup>29</sup>

Given the predominance of political philosophy that assumes or extols the positive value and moral significance of choice (almost always in idealised circumstances), the emergence of work using ideas of social construction to complicate this discourse is welcome. Clare Chambers, for example, holds that even if someone chooses an outcome, this does not necessarily make the outcome just. In contexts of entrenched power inequalities, she argues, people can internalise harmful social norms which lead them to make harmful choices.<sup>30</sup> Such arguments rightly destabilise the liberal choice/circumstance distinction and, though they play an important role in this paper, I do not aim to replicate them. Instead, I 'zoom in' on the different kinds of costs choice can bring in our current political context, illustrating how these arise and interact with one another, in order to outline how 'choice' functions in our deeply inegalitarian societies and why it is given such central place in contemporary political discourse. Moreover, whereas Chambers focuses on gender-based injustices,

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<sup>29</sup> Rose (1996).

<sup>30</sup> Chambers (2010).

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I build on her work by suggesting that the politics of responsabilisation is at play far more widely.

To do this, I start by inverting Scanlon's taxonomy of the values of choice, altering and supplementing it as I go. I begin with his framework, first, because it is well suited to this kind of 'zoomed in' project, designed as it is for just such micro-level unpicking. Second, his is one of the most prominent contemporary accounts of the value of choice; turning it on its head is intended as friendly provocation to the rather hegemonic 'value of choice' narratives within liberal political philosophy. Third, and related, his account captures much of the richness and complexity of our attachments to the ideals and practices of choice. It thus helps highlight the role these attachments play in reproducing the status quo.

Finally, it is interesting to explore how Scanlon's account is tested by application to the non-ideal. I argue that non-ideal contexts – marked by gender, race, and class inequalities – both reveal important but previously overlooked functions of choice, and productively challenge standard understanding of functions already noted. Non-ideal applications also demand that we examine closely how the various functions of choice interact with and reinforce one another; again, this is not often discussed in analyses of choice in idealised circumstances.<sup>31</sup>

I start by outlining Scanlon's account of the values of choice before discussing the importance of context in determining whether these values manifest. I describe our current socio-political context as one marked by serious, stubborn inequalities along the lines of race, gender and class. I then address Scanlon's three values of choice in turn. I argue that the instrumental function of choice means that oppressed groups

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<sup>31</sup> For example, Voorhoeve (2008), Stemplowska (2013a), and Scanlon (2013b) focus primarily on the instrumental value of choice and do not discuss how the three values of choice might interact.

face two kinds of greater costs, and that privileged groups often benefit from these inequalities. I then argue that the symbolic function of choice works to mark us all as 'equal choosers'. This sense of formal equality is bolstered by stories of individual triumph against the odds - stories that paint success as available to all who make the right decisions and try hard enough. Finally, I address the representative function of choice, arguing that the position of oppressed groups is often naturalised through their representation as either bad or defective choosers, or simply naturally suited to their positions. I end by discussing the political and emotional isolation that such a politics of responsabilisation engenders.

## 2.2. Scanlon: Three Values of Choice

Scanlon argues that choice has three kinds of value.<sup>32</sup> It has *instrumental value* when choosing lets us arrive at an outcome that best serves our desires or needs; my being able to choose what to eat for lunch has instrumental value because I know better than anyone else what I will most enjoy. It has *symbolic value* when having a certain choice is a sign of respect, in that it marks us as a member of equal standing in a wider and valued community of choosers. For example, being enfranchised can be valuable because (among other things) it signals to others that I am respected as a full member of my polity. Third, it has *representative value* when choosing allows us to express something about ourselves and our relation to the world. Scanlon suggests that this is why we like to choose what presents to buy for our loved ones, for example.<sup>33</sup>

Scanlon thinks it 'not necessary that our choices be free in a strong sense that entails complete independence from outside causes' to have these values.<sup>34</sup> This seems plausible and reflects our use of choice in non-philosophical discourse. For example,

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<sup>32</sup> Scanlon (2013b; 2000: Ch.6).

<sup>33</sup> Scanlon (2013b: 12).

<sup>34</sup> Scanlon (2013b).

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even if someone's decision was influenced by the food advert they saw on the way to work, we do not tend to say that they did not actually chose their lunch or that the choice was meaningless.

Scanlon mentions that choice can carry corresponding disvalues. He notes that if I do not understand the language of my lunch menu, my choosing what to eat may actually carry instrumental costs – I may end up with something I won't enjoy. He also recognises that choices can have negative representative value. As he says, 'it was not a good thing for Sophie to have her famous choice.'<sup>35</sup> And, conceivably, though he does not mention it, choices may also have negative symbolic value. Just as the right to vote valuably signals your status as a respected citizen, having the choice to wear a dress without social sanction might signal that others view you as a woman – a group membership that still carries some important symbolic disvalues.

But though Scanlon gives passing mention to some of these possibilities, they are not his focus. Rather, his work primarily attempts to explain 'why people have good reason to insist on moral principles and social arrangements that make outcomes depend on their choices.'<sup>36</sup> Yet he does recognise the role of context in determining whether the values of choice manifest and to what extent: 'the value [of a choice] depends on the conditions under which the choice is made.'<sup>37</sup> So it is to context I turn first.

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<sup>35</sup> Scanlon (2013b: 13). Sophie is a fictional character forced to choose which of her two children will die in order for the other to survive.

<sup>36</sup> Scanlon (2013b: 13).

<sup>37</sup> Scanlon (2013b: 13).

## 2.3. Choice in what Context?

*Every family should have the right to spend their money, after tax, as they wish, and not as the government dictates. Let us extend choice, extend the will to choose and the chance to choose. – Margaret Thatcher<sup>38</sup>*

The examples of relevant context Scanlon gives are often individualised and either fairly narrow – being too drunk to choose your own food well, for example – or extreme and rare, as in the case of Sophie’s choice.<sup>39</sup> I focus instead on the far more general (and diffuse) socio-political context of contemporary Euro-Atlantic societies, as this is the context within which we (as members of those societies conducting normative political work about them) most urgently need to know the values and costs of choice.<sup>40</sup> For want of a better term, I characterise this context as ‘neoliberal’. I briefly outline some of this context’s main characteristics before turning to examine the costs of choice within it.

‘Neoliberalism’ is a concept I will use to describe a loose system of action and a corresponding, mutually reinforcing system of thought.<sup>41</sup> I call the system of thought our neoliberal ‘schema’, and the system of action, neoliberal ‘practices’. Neoliberalism is broadly unified, first, through its push towards practices of

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<sup>38</sup> Thatcher (1975).

<sup>39</sup> Scanlon (2013b: 13). Though see footnote 40 for context.

<sup>40</sup> This shift in focus is not at odds with Scanlon’s project since he constructs accounts of choice and responsibility meant to take seriously the social conditions our choices are made under (specifically, whether others have discharged ‘what they owe to us’), rather than only the fact of our individual choices. His ‘value of choice’ account therefore has an important social element (even if the examples in Scanlon (2013b) do not always reflect this). This social dimension comes out most clearly in his hazardous waste example, in which the relevant context is neither individualised nor narrow (Scanlon 1986: 190–196).

<sup>41</sup> Rose and Miller (2010); Brown (2015); Rose (1996); Hall (2011). There has recently been much talk of ‘the death of neoliberalism’ (Jacques 2016). The truth of such claims remains unclear; though nationalist sentiment is on the rise, there are some signs this will not straightforwardly usurp but rather reconfigure the pre-eminence of ‘free trade’ and ‘free markets’ (see e.g. Elgot 2016). I take the notion of a ‘schema’ from Haslanger (2012c).



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marketization, and second, through its conceptualisation of the subject of government as that of an active chooser – a perpetually self-enterprising subject.

Before I explain these characterisations more fully, a few preliminaries. First, some background on the idea of a ‘political schema’ – the ‘system of thought’ element of neoliberalism – will prove useful. Notice that we could list uncountable facts about any given situation, and uncountable causes for any given event. A schema is a framework which helps us pick relevant facts and causes from this morass, characterise them in certain ways, and conceptualise their relation to other relevant facts. A political schema, then, is a framework for making reality ‘thinkable’ in order to govern it.<sup>42</sup> Importantly, it helps us conceive of the *persons* who are to be governed: are they conceptualised as God’s subjects, or as secular citizens enmeshed in and emerging from community networks, sustained through various dependencies and driven by various needs, or as actively choosing individual subjects, rationally pursuing their goals across all spheres of life?

A dominant political schema will rationalise, reinforce and naturalise dominant political practices, and vice versa. As Michel Foucault suggests, the form of power driving this dynamism between how we think of things and the practices we participate in is predominantly ‘creative’.<sup>43</sup> Unlike ‘repressive power’, which works through stopping certain outcomes through force or violence, creative power works by generating and shaping our tastes, desires, and habits through frequent repetition – through small, mundane drills which soon come to be repeated without thought.<sup>44</sup> In aggregate, these processes come to shape our very sense of ourselves as individuals. Creative power governs behaviour primarily through norms, rather than laws, since behavioural norms, with their intricate systems of rewards and

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<sup>42</sup> Rose (1996: 147).

<sup>43</sup> See Foucault (2012a; 2012b).

<sup>44</sup> Foucault (2012a).

sanctions, shape us daily, on a micro-level. As we conform to such norms, they can become invisible to us – we do not feel subject to any kind of external power, since the internalised norm is now ‘just what we do’.

Sandra Bartky, for example, enumerates the long list of practices that women are expected to undertake daily to achieve ‘femininity’.<sup>45</sup> Women are expected to comply with a whole host of norms, from dieting, to sitting with their legs together, to applying make-up in certain ways, right down to the expectation that they smile at appropriate times. Women voluntarily adhere to these practices because they make them feel normal (feminine) and may well come to take real pleasure from this adherence. Women’s choices, rather than symbolising the absence of patriarchal power, instead become essential to its smooth operation.

With this background in place I now characterise our political context with a necessarily over-brief account of why we might describe it as ‘neoliberal’. A neoliberal push towards marketization and the formation of self-enterprising subjects always interacts with local conditions to produce somewhat differentiated national results; I tell the story of the UK to give a flavour of the kind of transformations neoliberalism can bring (rather than to imply that these transformations will happen in exactly the same ways everywhere).<sup>46</sup>

In the UK during the 1970’s and early 1980’s, the ‘post-war consensus’, with its widespread support for a mixed economy and a welfare state, came under sustained attack. Economists deemed the welfare sector an unsustainable, ‘unproductive’ drain

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<sup>45</sup> Bartky (1988).

<sup>46</sup> On neoliberalism as a migratory set of practices with global reach but local instantiations see Ong (2007). For an argument about neoliberalism’s origins see Foucault (2010).

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on the economy<sup>47</sup>, and theorists argued that individual freedom, not collectivism, was both the reason for past progress and the route to continued advancement.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, it was argued that well-intentioned attempts to help the disadvantaged had in fact created a culture of passive dependency.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, capitalist market mechanisms could maximise individual freedom and social responsibility and secure productivity.

To expand market mechanisms into new areas, goods and activities first had to be 'monetized': re-characterised so that their value could be given in monetary terms, thus rendering them allocable through markets. Though these shifts in systems of action (towards marketized practices of evaluation and exchange) and systems of thought (towards reconceptualising the value of an increasing range of goods and services as equalling their monetary value in a market transaction) began to gain pace a few decades ago, you can spot their continued march today. Take recent attempts to re-characterise higher education to further marketize the sector. The latest UK Government's White Paper paints higher education as a 'marketplace' and universities as 'assets', within which fees capture the value of courses as set by the wider 'knowledge economy'.<sup>50</sup>

As marketization and monetisation have slowly and patchily transformed understandings and practices, our conceptualisations of ourselves – the people who make up our polity and are governed within it – have altered in tandem, helping to rationalise and solidify these transformations. During the earlier state-welfare period, the subject to be governed was conceptualised as one of various needs, attitudes and social relationships, 'a subject who was to be embraced within, and

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<sup>47</sup> For example, Bacon & Eltis (1976). Hadjimatheou and Skouras (1979: 392) report that Bacon and Eltis' argument 'had an immediate popular appeal that soon established it as part of the accepted political wisdom.'

<sup>48</sup> See Rose (1996), especially p.153.

<sup>49</sup> E.g. Mead (1993).

<sup>50</sup> Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills (2016: 5-6).

governed through, a nexus of collective solidarities and dependencies.’<sup>51</sup> In contrast, the subject to be governed is now conceptualised as an active citizen-consumer of various marketized goods and services. In 1992 the World Bank illustrated this shift nicely, stating that, ‘Women must not be regarded as mere recipients of public support. They are, first and foremost, economic agents.’<sup>52</sup>

Political subjects thus come to be specified as ‘active individuals seeking to ‘enterprise themselves’, to maximise their quality of life through acts of choice, according their life a meaning and value to the extent that it can be rationalised as the outcome of choices made or choices to be made.’<sup>53</sup> Unemployed people become ‘jobseekers’ and homeless people become ‘rough sleepers’, as people come to be characterised through their perceived actions rather than their perceived needs.<sup>54</sup> Those applying for state support now visit ‘customer centres’ to do so, and benefits are increasingly conditional – in other words, supposedly sensitive to claimants’ choices – rather than inalienable.<sup>55</sup> Students likewise become ‘consumers’ within an educational marketplace.<sup>56</sup> A certain understanding of the value and importance of individual choice lies at the heart of this characterisation of human agents.

Some have prospered within this period, but this prosperity has remained stubbornly unequal. In the UK, for example, economic inequality has risen markedly since the 1980s<sup>57</sup> and remains divided along lines of race and gender. Women in the

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<sup>51</sup> Rose (1996: 146).

<sup>52</sup> As quoted in Kingfisher (2002: 3).

<sup>53</sup> Rose (1996). See also Peters’ (1982: 10) famous neoliberal ‘manifesto’ in which he writes that ‘our hero is the risk-taking entrepreneur’.

<sup>54</sup> Rose (1996: 59).

<sup>55</sup> Lambeth Council (n.d.). On welfare conditionality in the UK, see Dwyer (2004); Chapters 3 and 4 explore how the language of choice works so successfully to legitimise such benefits changes.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Competition between providers in any market incentivises them to raise their game, offering consumers a greater choice of more innovative and better quality products and services at lower cost. Higher education is no exception’ – Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills (2016: 8).

<sup>57</sup> Cribb (2013).

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UK are more likely to be employed in low paid, part-time work, to have fewer financial assets, to live in poverty, to head a single parent household<sup>58</sup>, and to shoulder a greater burden of unpaid care work<sup>59</sup>. People of Black and Pakistani/Bangladeshi origins in the UK, particularly men, have had much lower employment rates in the last thirty years, and their employment levels took the hardest hits during each of the recessions within this period. These ethnic groups remain nearly twice as likely to be unemployed as white people.<sup>60</sup> Unsurprisingly, given this, the poverty rate is twice as high for Black and Minority Ethnic ('BAME') groups as for white groups.<sup>61</sup> More generally, most BAME groups do less well, economically, than the white majority, especially Black, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi people.<sup>62</sup>

This, then, sets our context. Political subjects are understood as actively choosing citizens, working to efficiently maximise their preference satisfaction through their individual choices within a marketplace of goods, ideas and services. Meanwhile, economic inequalities along class, race and gender lines are either remaining stable or worsening. It is sometimes said that neoliberal subjects are 'governed through choice'; what follows is an attempt to explain how this might happen, and why the costs fall where they do.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Reis (2018); Fawcett Society (2019).

<sup>59</sup> Coote and Himmelweit (2013).

<sup>60</sup> Li (2014).

<sup>61</sup> Weekes-Bernard (2017).

<sup>62</sup> Fisher and Nandi (2015: 8).

<sup>63</sup> E.g. Rose (1996: 147); Denbow (2015).

## 2.4. The Costs of Choice

### 2.4.1. Instrumental costs

*It's the 21st century. It's the age of 'people know best'. Parents know best what works for their kids. Doctors and nurses know best how to improve the NHS and give patients great healthcare. Residents know best how to make their neighbourhoods better places to live. – David Cameron<sup>64</sup>*

The instrumental value of choice is often illustrated through the example of choosing one's own food. Since presumably I know best what I most want and need for lunch, I best fulfil these needs and desires if I choose what to eat myself. My choosing facilitates my achieving some other good - being happily fed, in this instance - hence the instrumental nature of this value.

Though Scanlon does not make the distinction himself, I want to distinguish two kinds of instrumental value. I call *outcome values/costs* those instrumental values or disvalues attached to the outcome of a choice, and *input values/costs* those instrumental values or disvalues attached to the process of choosing. By choosing my own lunch, I may maximise my outcome value by selecting what I most need and want. As mentioned, much discussion of Scanlon's account focuses on just such values.<sup>65</sup> But choosing my own lunch might also minimise my input costs; I need not describe my tastes and inclinations to a third party who then assesses these in light of my options and decides for me. Input value is instrumental because, like outcome value, it lets us best serve some other goal – for example, choosing lunch with minimum time and effort. I will argue that we should not overlook the input values and costs of choice. But, because outcome costs and values remain important and are more commonly discussed, I start here.

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<sup>64</sup> Cameron (2007).

<sup>65</sup> See footnote 31 (p.20).

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Many feminist philosophers draw on ideas of ‘social construction’, arguing that people and their choices are deeply formed and shaped by their social environment.<sup>66</sup> This has been used to problematize the moral significance of choice and to highlight how the outcome costs of choices often accrue unequally in the context of unequal power relations, falling disproportionately on oppressed groups. For example, Chambers calls attention to the choice some women make to forsake paid work to do unpaid care work in the home.<sup>67</sup> Such choices are (to borrow Rose’s framing) enwrapped in a web of incitements<sup>68</sup>, immediate sanctions<sup>69</sup>, and forebodings of future sanctions<sup>70</sup>. In forsaking income, these women tend to become financially dependent on others in ways extremely hard to reverse. In other words, these choices carry serious and resilient outcome costs.<sup>71</sup>

Chambers notes that these choices often directly benefit men, who can remain in paid employment knowing that someone else - almost always a woman - will step up to take on the necessary unpaid carework. They remain financially independent, professionally connected and experienced, and hold a large amount of control over the family’s income. Social norms are generative – they shape people’s behaviour and regulate their choices through becoming internalised, at which point the unthinking repetition of actions that reinforce the norm works to solidify its hold.

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<sup>66</sup> See Bartky (1988); Chambers (2010); Allen (2011).

<sup>67</sup> Chambers (2010: 121-125).

<sup>68</sup> Pook, ‘Giving up work was best thing I did’, as quoted in Chambers (2010: 125).

<sup>69</sup> Abrams, ‘Nurseries are safe and secure - but are they bad for your baby?’ as quoted in Chambers (2010: 125).

<sup>70</sup> Bentham, ‘Working Mothers damage children’s education’ as quoted in Chambers (2010: 125).

<sup>71</sup> In Chapters 4 and 5, I argue that the bundle of costs and benefits attached to a choice depends on our wider practices of valuing certain inputs above others, viewing certain outcomes as internal to choices and others as external, and selecting relevant agents from all of those involved in producing the outcome. As I here aim to make visible the costs of our *current* understandings and practices of choice, I try to observe the contours of our current dominant practices of delimiting the consequences of choice. Current political-economic arrangements do not reimburse women for choosing to provide informal carework, for example.

Because of these gendered carework norms and practices heralding women as primary unpaid caregivers, then, men as a group tend to gain outcome benefits and women suffer outcome costs from this set of choices.<sup>72</sup>

Our neoliberal political schema, like its liberal predecessor, easily overlooks such unpaid carework since it occurs outside of the market. Wendy Brown sums up the consequences of this: ‘women disproportionately remain the invisible infrastructure for all developing, mature, and worn-out human capital – children, adults, disabled, and elderly.’<sup>73</sup> Brown argues that the shrinking of public infrastructure that supports families, children and the elderly that has occurred in the last few decades intensifies these inequalities since women again disproportionately step into the breach.<sup>74</sup>

Gendered social norms are far from the only source of unequal outcome costs.<sup>75</sup> Scanlon’s favoured ‘food choice’ example presents another case, for food choice is currently a source of severe and unequal outcome costs. Obesity is a high cost to pay for one’s food choices - and a highly visible one, in terms of its socio-political stigma. In the US, where obesity rates are some of the highest in the world, Black and Hispanic youth are exposed to more food marketing that promotes foods high in sugar, saturated fat and salt than white youth are.<sup>76</sup> These groups receive a ‘double

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<sup>72</sup> Here and throughout, by stating that a cost of choice accrues disproportionately to an oppressed social group, I do not mean to suggest that we can attribute their situation solely to such effects.

<sup>73</sup> Brown (2015: 105).

<sup>74</sup> Brown (2015: 105). Such costs do not fall on all women equally since better-off families can employ others to help shoulder their care burden. This is one of the many places where the need to view class, race and gender inequalities together becomes apparent. For further discussion on how contemporary practices of unpaid and low-paid carework are raced and classed, see Chapter 7, Section 3.3.

<sup>75</sup> Take evidence that university choices are affected by norms about which social class and race ‘belong’ at which institutions (Reay *et al.* 2001; Boliver 2013). These choices likely carry long-term instrumental costs for working class applicants and applicants of colour (Vignoles *et al.* 2016). If Roger Brown (2012) is right that further education is becoming more stratified as it is further ‘marketized’, we should expect these unequal cost distributions to worsen.

<sup>76</sup> Harris *et al.* (2015); Powell, Wada, and Kumanyika (2014).



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dose' of this marketing, through greater exposure to media advertisements and higher levels of marketing messages in their communities.<sup>77</sup> And they live in neighbourhoods with a more 'obesity-promoting' mix of food on sale – neighbourhoods with relatively less inexpensive healthier food options and relatively more fast-food restaurants.<sup>78</sup>

Again here, instrumental outcome costs fall systematically and unequally in contexts where incitements to harmful behaviour are themselves systematically unequal, and these outcome costs help perpetuate severe inequalities – in this case, severe health inequalities. These incitements can be internalised through advertising and habit, or entrenched through unequal access to sources of wellbeing, like the availability of healthy food. This, then, is the first reason to be alive to the costs of choice as well as its values: in contexts marked by unequal social norms and/or unequal access to sources of wellbeing, the differential outcome costs and values of people's choices are one of the ways through which inequalities are perpetuated and entrenched.

Now to input costs. To choose, we need knowledge of ourselves and our options, and we need to reason with this knowledge, judge risks, and weigh competing desires. These are the obvious input costs of choosing, since gathering, assessing and deciding takes time and effort.<sup>79</sup> In contexts like the UK where formal educational attainment is strongly linked to socio-economic background, we might again worry that these costs fall unequally and help reproduce inequalities.<sup>80</sup> Rather than discuss time costs, I focus on the costs in terms of effort of will that choosing can carry, as these are important but all too easy to overlook. By these costs I mean the necessary

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<sup>77</sup> Harris *et al.* (2015: 4).

<sup>78</sup> Powell *et al.* (2014). The same is true of the UK (Butler 2018).

<sup>79</sup> Dworkin (1982) discusses these costs, though not their potentially unequal distribution.

<sup>80</sup> The charity TeachFirst (2018) reports that the link between low socio-economic background and poor educational attainment is greater in the UK than almost any other developed country. For academic data and analysis see Machin and Vignoles (2004) and Crawford (2014).

focus, awareness, alertness to one's situation, and discipline involved in making yourself choose what you know you should.

In trying to keep these efforts of self-discipline visible, I follow Lauren Berlant. Writing about the global obesity epidemic, Berlant calls attention to 'the burdens of compelled will that exhaust people taken up by managing contemporary labour and household pressures.'<sup>81</sup> Berlant wants us to notice the exhaustion arising from a constant need to 'choose well', particularly for subjects already variously exploited and oppressed.

Once we note the invisible effort involved in 'choosing well' against the odds, we can see that even those who resist frequent micro-incitements may not do so costlessly. If someone belongs to a community heavily targeted with incitements to certain behaviours and manages to resist them, we should not thereby assume that they escape the costs of choice just because these costs are not easily or immediately visible. The effort of discipline and will that such 'swimming against the tide' requires may leave them less strength of will to make other choices, attend to other issues, and fulfil other obligations. Berlant suggestively describes our 'sovereign will' – that part of us able to consciously and calculatedly make choices – as exhaustible and episodic.<sup>82</sup> Recognising this helps to highlight how resisting constant micro-incitements is not costless – rather, the costs are just easily overlooked.

I have already discussed how oppressive social norms are internalised and can then generate choices reproductive of that oppression, making an agent's social context vital in constituting the value of a certain set of choices. But Berlant's point foregrounds another way in which context can matter. Now we have reason to put

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<sup>81</sup> Berlant (2007: 757).

<sup>82</sup> Berlant (2007: 779), for example, writes about the necessity of 'small vacations from the will itself, which is so often spent from the pressures of coordinating one's pacing with the working day.'

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the individual choices of that agent in the context of their own personal wider resources of time and energy: if they are exhausted because they are oppressed or exploited, they may simply not have the time or energy left for making good, 'self-enterprising choices' against the grain of their environments. Internalization need not have occurred in such circumstances; the person may know they are choosing badly and yet be unable to do otherwise, given the ongoing, exhausting combination of environmental attrition and incitement they face.<sup>83</sup>

Berlant's work on obesity, eating and the over-compelled, exhausted or simply absent 'sovereign will' challenges the neoliberal construction of subjects as always 'actively choosing'. She argues that exhausted, exploited populations seek escape from this demand for ever-calculating, forward-looking choice through 'spreading-out activities like sex or eating, oriented toward pleasure or self-abeyance, that do not occupy time, decision, or consequentiality in anything like the registers of autonomous self-assertion.'<sup>84</sup> Not everything we do is best understood as choice; sometimes our behaviour arises out of habit, unconscious or semi-conscious motivation, compulsive need, fear, addiction, a need for respite, or simple exhaustion.

One way to mitigate the costs of our current understandings and practices of choice on particularly exploited communities, then, might be to take up Berlant's call for 'better ways to talk about activity oriented toward the reproduction of ordinary life'.<sup>85</sup> By this, I take her to be calling for better ways to talk about 'going with the flow' of social norms and distributions of access to wellbeing, rather than viewing all such behaviour as active choice. Talking about this range of activity is a first step to

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<sup>83</sup> Stemplowska (2009: 249) is the only responsibility-sensitive egalitarian I have come across who acknowledges this, writing that 'surely... people need some areas of their life where they can at least occasionally perform below their best without suffering negative consequences as a result (if only to perform at their best elsewhere).'

<sup>84</sup> Berlant (2007: 757).

<sup>85</sup> Berlant (2007: 757).

theorising its political significance, and would provide a valuable challenge to the neoliberal ideal of the perpetually self-enterprising subject.<sup>86</sup> In this context, Scanlon's concession that sometimes the value of choice lies in *having* a choice and sometimes in *making* a choice begins to look worrying; it ushers through unremarked the slip from 'having' to 'making', thereby leaving unchallenged the characterisation of all behaviour where choice was *possible* as thereby instantiating active, conscious choice.<sup>87</sup>

Choice can and does have instrumental costs, then: it has outcome costs when what we choose is bad for us, and it has input costs because the choices we make take time, knowledge, skill, energy, attention and discipline. Moreover, there are reasons to believe that those who already have less – the working class, women, and people of colour – bear an unequal share of both kinds of instrumental costs. Unequal social norms, and unequal access to resources as simple as time, fresh food, and energy constantly nudge such groups towards instrumentally costly choices. These incitements are both costly to resist and costly to accede to.

#### ***2.4.2. The symbolic equality of actively choosing citizens***

*Choice puts the levers in the hands of parents and patients so that they as citizens and consumers can be a driving force for improvement in their public services. And the choice we support is choice open to all on the basis of their equal status as citizens not on the unequal basis of their wealth. – Tony Blair<sup>88</sup>*

Scanlon describes the symbolic value of choice as conferring on the chooser a symbol of their adult competence - a sign of their equal membership in the group of mature

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<sup>86</sup> This change of focus necessarily displaces the individual chooser as the primary locus of political theorising. In advocating for a focus on social practices over individual choices (see Chapters 6-8) this thesis aims to illustrate one of the possibilities that this displacement opens up.

<sup>87</sup> Scanlon (2013b: 11).

<sup>88</sup> Blair (2004a).

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agents, capable of choosing for themselves. He writes that, 'if people like me are expected to make certain kinds of choices for themselves, then the fact that I rely on others to make such choices or, worse, that I am not allowed by others to make such choices, indicates that I do not have, in my own eyes or those of others, the status of a competent person.'<sup>89</sup>

For a choice to have positive symbolic value therefore depends, first, on the existence of a norm dictating that certain others around you also have this choice, and second, that your being on a par with these others is a positive sign. This value disappears, then, if either of these conditions are unmet: a choice has no symbolic value if there is no relevant group who normally have it, or if having that choice signals one's membership in a group with negative connotations. Choices can carry symbolic costs, as with certain choices offered only to women that symbolise one's membership in this category. But rather than analyse these costs, I will instead focus on how the set of choices citizens are formally allocated carry particularly strong symbolic *value*. I focus on this to argue that the symbolic importance of our 'equality as citizen-choosers' is used as an important counter-narrative to substantive inequalities – inequalities entrenched by the fall-out from the representative and instrumental functions of choice, among other things.

Within our current political schema people are conceptualised as, first and foremost, actively choosing citizens. Our ability to choose is held to be one of the primary markers of our equal standing: neoliberal citizenship is 'manifested... in the energetic pursuit of personal fulfilment and the incessant calculations that are to enable this to be achieved.'<sup>90</sup> In such an environment, denying someone the ability to make a choice that others are granted comes to be seen as a serious threat to their equal standing. In other words, within such a political schema our equal formal

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<sup>89</sup> Scanlon (2013a: 13-14).

<sup>90</sup> Rose and Miller (2010: 201).

access to a certain bundle of choices takes on particularly strong symbolic value; to remove one of these choices from someone is to seriously disrespect their position as an equal adult member of society.

Almost as bad as the personal disrespect it symbolises, limiting consumer choice is also understood to threaten national economic growth since it interferes with markets and therefore the motor of economic productivity. This distinctive conceptualisation of political agents forms one point of an ideological triumvirate: the nation-state, economic growth, and the actively choosing citizen function in relations of mutual support and entanglement. In the USA, the 'Personal Responsibility in Food Consumption Act of 2005' – also known as the 'Cheeseburger Bill' – illustrates this. Seeking to immunise the food industry from an increasing number of legal suits from obese customers, the first thing the Act notes is that 'the food and beverage industries are a significant part of our national economy.'<sup>91</sup> Lawsuits seeking to blame fast food companies for obesity are 'not only legally frivolous and economically damaging, but also harmful to a healthy America.'<sup>92</sup> In discussion of the Bill, its Congressman author stated that 'in a country like the United States where freedom of choice is cherished, nobody is forced to super-size their fast-food meals', highlighting everyone's symbolic equality as choosers, and entangling the health of the nation with both its formal economy and its 'protection' of the individual consumer-citizen's choices.<sup>93</sup>

Yet this symbolic equality of choice is just that – symbolic. As argued, people with formal access to the same choice – people who are symbolically equal in this sense –

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<sup>91</sup> US Congress (2005: 2). Twenty-three states have passed similar laws (Burnett 2006: 365).

<sup>92</sup> US Congress (2005: 2). George Bush's (2001) speech after September 11 also drew upon the normative links between the consumer-citizen, the nation-state and the market when he asked citizens to keep spending in the wake of the attack ('I ask your continued participation and confidence in the American economy. Terrorists attacked a symbol of American prosperity; they did not touch its source').

<sup>93</sup> 'Personal Responsibility in Food Consumption Act' (2004: 27).

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can face vastly different instrumental input costs in terms of time, effort, access to information and resources, and energy required, to make comparable choices, and they often choose in contexts where they are incited to internalise unequal social norms that harm them and benefit others. The symbolic equality of having *formal* access to the same bundle of choices cannot eliminate or even mitigate the many substantive inequalities of such situations. The symbolic equality granted to us by our formally equal bundles of choices neither ensures nor promotes equal outcomes, equal inputs, social relations of equal standing, or even equal benefits for equal effort, nor any other version of substantive equality propounded by egalitarians. The symbolic equality granted by formally equal bundles of consumer choices is not the kind of equality we should seek.

Yet the strong value accorded to the symbolic equality of the enterprising, actively-choosing citizen is often used as a counter-narrative to egalitarian concern for the serious substantive inequalities that result from it. This often happens through paradigmatic individual success stories: proof that we *could* all transform our symbolic equality as choosers into substantial economic and social prosperity if only we try hard and choose well.

Oprah Winfrey, who was born into poverty and abuse but is now ‘the world’s most powerful black woman’<sup>94</sup> and the first and only black woman multi-billionaire in the US<sup>95</sup> is an example of this. Winfrey’s brand, ‘one of the most lucrative... in the world’<sup>96</sup>, is about ‘taking responsibility for your life, knowing that every choice that you’ve made has led you to where you are right now. Well, the good news is that everybody has the power, no matter where you are in your life, to start changing it

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<sup>94</sup> As quoted in Peck (2010: 8).

<sup>95</sup> Nsehe (2016).

<sup>96</sup> Miller (2009).

today.’<sup>97</sup> Within these political discourses, we all have the power to do better through choosing better; the symbolic equality of our having choices is equated with a real and immutable potential for substantive future prosperity.<sup>98</sup> There is something quasi-religious about this belief; following Mark Fisher and David Smail, let’s call it ‘magical voluntarism.’<sup>99</sup>

Through this belief in magical voluntarism, our symbolic equality as choosers is used to detract from the unfairness of other substantive inequalities, since such substantive inequalities are rendered matters of choice. Lacking health/wages/knowledge, for example, is simply a sign of bad food/employment/education choices. And, since our status as trusted active choosers is paramount to our status as equal, adult members of the political community, substantive inequalities become personal problems rather than political injustices. For those struggling, the lure of stories like Winfrey’s instantiates a kind of ‘cruel optimism’ at work within attachments to the symbolic value of choice: it keeps people hopefully working, dieting, and consuming while quietly eliding any structural barriers they face to the achievement of their goals.<sup>100</sup>

Note that universal non-choice can confer symbolic equalising value too, but this kind of value is currently far less feted. No UK citizen is afforded a choice about whether or not national laws to apply to them, for instance. This equality of non-choice carries symbolic value as an important sign of (at least formal) equal footing within the legal sphere: equality before the law. The symbolic value of choice is only one form that the symbolic value of being treated equally along some important

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<sup>97</sup> Peck (2010: 9).

<sup>98</sup> It is also reminiscent of the classic ‘American Dream’. And it connects to Bonilla-Silva’s (2017: 49) analysis of the central frames of contemporary ‘colour-blind’ racism, especially *abstract liberalism* (‘I am all for equal opportunity, that’s why I oppose affirmative action’) and *minimisation of racism* (‘Everyone has almost the same opportunities to succeed.’).

<sup>99</sup> Smail, as quoted in Fisher (2011).

<sup>100</sup> I take the term ‘cruel optimism’ from Berlant (2011).



dimension can take; to be afforded choices can be a sign of equal membership of a group, but so can being equally denied choices, or equally obligated to perform duties. Yet, within our current context, the dominant valued dimension of equal treatment is equal formal access to a certain bundle of choices, a symbolic equality that comes to erode the value of much else.<sup>101</sup>

### 2.4.3. Representative costs

*[T]oo many young men in our community continue to make bad choices. Growing up, I made a few myself. And I have to confess, sometimes I wrote off my own failings as just another example of the world trying to keep a black man down. But... there's no longer any room for excuses. I understand that there's a common fraternity creed here at Morehouse: 'Excuses are tools of the incompetent, used to build bridges to nowhere and monuments of nothingness.' – Barack Obama<sup>102</sup>*

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<sup>101</sup> Brown (2015: 18) similarly argues that neoliberal reason 'hollows out' contemporary liberal democratic ideals and imperils 'more radical democratic imaginaries.' It has begun to look like what *has* survived this hollowing out of ideals of a shared, public good are ethno-nationalist ideals, heavy with nostalgia for an imagined safer past.

<sup>102</sup> As quoted in Coates (2013). Throughout the thesis I use this quote as emblematic of the 'pull up your pants' strand of race politics, named due to adherents' preoccupation with the idea that if people of colour would only pull up their pants, they would gain respectability and do better in life. (E.g. After George Zimmerman was found not guilty of killing unarmed teenager Trayvon Martin, CNN anchor Don Lemon put this action first in his list of five things African Americans need to do to improve themselves and their circumstances {Richmond 2015; see also Coates 2008}). While patterns of racial formation in the UK have important differences, Ansell (1997: 265) argues that the UK shares with the US a strategy of 'mystifying complex structural sources of social disadvantage via the construction of racialized victims who are themselves blamed for their own subordinate social location.' This can be seen, for example, in political explanations of the 2001 race riots by appeal to South Asian people's tendency to 'self-segregate', thus undermining community cohesion; one government report on these riots stated that racial and economic polarizations were 'to an extent by choice' (Rhodes 2009: 3.6). It is evident in Jack Straw's view that Muslim women's wearing of the niqab hindered community relations (Taylor & Dodd 2006). And in David Cameron's statement that the 2011 riots were about bad parenting and criminality, not race or poverty (Cameron 2011b). A classed form of this politics was clearly evidenced when Cameron told one of Britain's poorest constituencies that, 'We talk about people being at risk of poverty, or social exclusion: it's as if these things—obesity, alcohol abuse, drug addiction—are purely external events, like a plague, or bad weather. Of course, circumstances –

Choice has representative value when it lets us represent and communicate something of value about ourselves and our relation to the world – when what we choose says something positive about us and our relationships. I want to choose what to give my family for their birthdays because I want my choices to represent and communicate how I view them and how I value our relationships.

Clearly, though, choice can represent a whole range of things, both positive and negative. My choice to leave the washing up for you may say a host of things about me and us, either valuable (I am comfortable enough to do this) or costly (I think this menial task better suited to you; I value my own time above yours). This representative function is one of the more complicated facets of choice and I will manage only a partial account, focusing on three kinds of representative costs in particular. I begin by exploring what I call the ‘spiralling effects’ of choice, arguing that choice in the context of widespread belief in the magical voluntarism described above can work in concert with negative representations of oppressed groups to cement and exacerbate their oppression. I then address two more immediate costs this representative function can have for members of oppressed groups - those of personal and political isolation.

First to the spiralling effects of choice’s representative function. My choices have representative value because we extrapolate from them clues about my wider character, views, and attachments: my choices are supposed to communicate ‘who I am’ in some sense. I argued in Section 2.4.1 that we have reason to expect oppressed groups to bear instrumental costs of choice unequally because they choose in contexts of harmful social norms and environments instantiating unequal access to

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where you are born, your neighbourhood, your school and the choices your parents make – have a huge impact. But social problems are often the consequence of the choices people make’ (see Stratton 2008).

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sources of wellbeing and unequal incitements towards harmful choices. The representative function of choice means the story does not end there. If we view my choice of outcome  $x$  as representing who I am, but as a member of an oppressed group I am pushed again and again to make choices that are instrumentally costly to myself, I will likely soon come to be viewed as a 'bad chooser'. In this way, bad choices come to constitute and reinforce negative representations of oppressed groups. This occurs in this section's guide quote from Barack Obama, where he characterises the class of young black men he is addressing as belonging to a community of 'bad choosers.'

Extremely costly 'spirals' form when the representation of a community as one that makes certain bad choices starts to, in turn, affect the material context and social norms relevant to that community. First, negative perceptions of a group as 'bad choosers' can affect how others treat them in ways that make it even harder for that group to begin making the 'good choices' necessary to escape these negative representations. Fast food advertisers don't just happen to target advertising on black communities in the USA; they do it because they view these communities as likely consumers of their products. And when black men are treated as bad or risky customers, these kinds of racist representations lead to their exclusion from a wide variety of economic goods, services, and opportunities – goods, services, and opportunities that are essential to functioning as a 'good chooser' within our economy.

The expectation that they will make these 'bad choices' neither precedes their representation as a community of 'bad choosers', nor vice versa; rather the representation of a specific *kind* of people and the shrinking opportunities to contradict these representations grow together. But though they grow together, these representations, incitements and choices are not stable or still: past choices shape

how the group is represented, which shifts expectations for future choices, so that the loop from choice to representation shifts slightly too.<sup>103</sup>

Once poor black communities are seen as particularly good targets for this advertising, for example, they are subjected to more of it. This shifts their choices slightly again, since they then choose under a heavier burden of incitements, including a growing number of fast food restaurants and a shrinking pool of healthy options on their doorstep. These small, gradual shifts are part of why oppressive social relations like racism are often described as having a ‘changing same’ quality.<sup>104</sup>

These spirals, where certain behaviours (interpreted always, in a neoliberal paradigm, as the making of certain intentional *choices*) come to mark you as being a certain kind of person and vice versa, are what Ian Hacking calls the ‘looping effect’ of human kinds.<sup>105</sup> I prefer ‘spiralling effect’ simply because a slightly different trajectory is always emerging. Such effects will be varied and complex and will interact with a whole host of other forces. But we have particular cause to worry about these effects within a culture which expects different things from different genders, races and classes because it represents certain outcomes as just part of what it means to be a member of a certain class, gender or race.

Groups pushed towards instrumentally costly behaviours are often cast as defective, stupid, dangerous, or unreliable through convenient and selective amplification of these representative costs. During arguments for the ‘cheeseburger bill’, for example, the author’s professed aim to protect ‘freedom to choose’ was followed quickly by the claim that, ‘people who bring these lawsuits against the food industry don’t need

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<sup>103</sup> On this, I follow Hacking’s (1996: 361) claim that ‘recognition and expectation are of a piece.’

<sup>104</sup> E.g. Bonilla-Silva (2017: 9).

<sup>105</sup> Hacking (1996).

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a lawyer, they need a psychiatrist.’<sup>106</sup> As obese people are cast as lazy and/or mentally defective<sup>107</sup>, similarly mothers are viewed as untrustworthy workers lest they put carework before formal employment<sup>108</sup>, and African American men are viewed as dangerous or risky customers and employees, further shutting them out of substantive economic equality<sup>109</sup>.

In short, structural inequalities are swept up into individuals’ choices, via the fantasy of their perpetually sovereign wills and their symbolic equality as choosers. In this way, the ‘value of choice’ narrative that functions in public political discourse does not merely leave inequalities unchallenged; it actively helps cement them.

These spiralling effects also work through self-perception. What we’ve chosen in the past builds our own sense of what we are capable of, what our strengths are, what our character is – of who we ‘are’. ‘I picked the wrong present’ soon becomes ‘I am bad at picking presents.’ To end, I explore the personal and political consequences of this for ‘bad’ or ‘unreliable’ choosers themselves.

The artificial set up of a recent Dove deodorant commercial neatly isolates these effects.<sup>110</sup> In a shopping centre, Dove mounted a sign above each of the two entry doors; above one, a ‘beautiful’ sign, and above the other, an ‘average’ sign. Women arriving at this shopping centre were filmed choosing which door to enter through – choosing whether to affirm their beauty or averageness – and then interviewed. The door choice carries hardly any instrumental or symbolic costs or values, allowing their own self-representation and its consequences to take centre stage.

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<sup>106</sup> ‘Personal Responsibility in Food Consumption Act’ (2004: 27).

<sup>107</sup> Friedman and Puhl (2012).

<sup>108</sup> Three in four mothers surveyed recently in the UK reported having had a ‘negative or possibly discriminatory experience during pregnancy, maternity leave, and/or on return from maternity leave’ (Adams *et al.* 2016).

<sup>109</sup> Chapters 7-8 focus on this phenomenon.

<sup>110</sup> Dove US (2015).

The set-up implies that women can choose whether to feel beautiful or not and the women interviewed appear to accept this: they report feeling different about their bodies after choosing a door.<sup>111</sup> This seems true to at least the following extent: you can occasionally make yourself feel better or worse about your body through sheer force of will. But, most interestingly for our purposes, after making this choice the women come to see themselves as responsible for their body image. They start to see their body image as a series of ongoing choices that they make. One (who chose 'average') says 'It was my choice. And now I will question myself for the next week, maybe month'. Another felt bad after 'choosing average' because 'obviously, I had rated myself average, and nobody else.'<sup>112</sup>

Their apparent ability to briefly control their own body image through choice comes to represent an ongoing ability to control this image. Just as Oprah's success story comes to represent the magical voluntarist possibility that we could all be billionaires if we would only make the right choices, the momentary successes of these women in shaping their self-representations through nothing but their own choices come to represent the possibility that they could always do so.

The choice of whether to assert one's beauty is significant in a context where women's looks are endlessly sensationalised through a near-constant barrage of micro-threats and incitements.<sup>113</sup> In such a context, it is impossible for most women

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<sup>111</sup> Dove's slogan, 'Choose Beautiful' (Dove US 2015), reinforces this: feeling beautiful or not is simply a choice you can make.

<sup>112</sup> Dove US (2015). One woman does express confusion about what her choice represents, but even she maintains a clear distinction between what she believes about herself and the outside messages she feels 'bombarded' by; she asks 'Am I choosing because of what's constantly bombarded at me, and what I am being told that I should accept? Or am I choosing because that's what I really believe?'

<sup>113</sup> A recent advertisement asks women, 'Are you beach body ready?' next to a photo of a bikini-clad model – see Sweney (2015). For accounts of the familial and social pressures women face to look a certain way, see Fahs' (2011) students' experiences of not adhering to female hair removal

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to continually 'choose' to feel beautiful in any meaningful way – even more so for women whose skin colour or hair type do not approximate the racialised beauty standards that operate in the Euro-Atlantic West. But once the possibility of making one isolated choice of this kind is brought to the fore, these women feel that their inability to make the 'right choice' on an ongoing basis is their fault, rather than a fault of their environment. They know they are capable of 'choosing beautiful', so why can they not choose it regularly? The representation of an effect of structural oppression as just bad personal choice can be a recipe for emotional isolation, self-directed frustration and confusion for the 'bad chooser'.

The characterisation of subjects as actively choosing agents above all else perpetuates this primacy of choice above context. Crucial to this is the invisibility of input costs – especially willpower costs – described earlier, and the indifferent equivocation between having ongoing formal opportunities to choose and having the resources and context necessary to enable sustained, meaningful choices.

Furthermore, this emotional isolation can carry political consequences. How can one see oneself as part of a solidaristic community bound together through shared oppression if one attributes one's situation to bad personal choice? Within such a political schema, all anxieties, lacks and needs come to seem personal problems and failings – things to feel ashamed of, to try harder on, but not to make public or seek wider socio-political change around. In situations of precarity, where the means of flourishing (a home, income security, self-esteem, nutritious food, time to rest and to care for others etc.) are available but only on the condition that we 'choose well', this political isolation can be wide-ranging.

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norms. The campaign group 'No More Page 3' compared every picture of men and women in The Sun (the UK's best-selling newspaper) for 6 months; most men were pictured clothed and active, displaying a range of emotions, while most women wore very little and were passive (Studio 212, 2014). As for incitements, consider the make-up brand L'Oreal's famous slogan 'Because you're worth it'.

Such depoliticising individualistic isolation is visible in our current political conversations. In the economic sphere, those who choose well are ‘strivers’, while those who lack or need are ‘skivers’. Women who struggle simply need to ‘lean in’ at work, ‘choose beauty’ at home, and think positive.<sup>114</sup> And people of colour must let go of their ‘excuses’, make use of their inalienable power to choose better, and knuckle down.

Rose notes that the left has struggled to articulate a successful counter-narrative to this political schema. Doing so requires an alternative ethics and a different understanding of the subject that is as compelling as the ethics and understandings ‘inherent in the rationality of the market and the valorisation of choice.’<sup>115</sup> Several avenues look promising. First, can we conceive of a subject that is socially constructed and instantiates a richer range of behaviour than ‘active choice’ alone? Second, can we articulate persuasive egalitarian ideals beyond the bare symbolic, formal equality of choice? And third, can we reach beyond the lonely individuation of neoliberal politics to bring structural injustices to the fore, without giving up on agency altogether?

## **2.5. Conclusion: Putting Choices in Context**

Choice is central to our dominant political conception of agents. I have tried to untangle some of the ways in which the ideal of personal choice functions, focusing particularly on the kinds of costs it carries, who bears their brunt, and how they interact with other costs and inequalities.<sup>116</sup> I argued that choice can and does have some serious costs that do not fall equally. Members of oppressed groups often

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<sup>114</sup> ‘Lean in’ is a reference to Sandberg (2013). See also Rottenberg (2014).

<sup>115</sup> Rose (1996: 160).

<sup>116</sup> The topic is large and I have undoubtedly neglected important parts. In particular, having focused so much on costs and inequalities, I trust the large ‘value of choice’ literature to serve as necessary balance.



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shoulder a lion's share of instrumental costs, due to harmful social norms and unequal access to sources of wellbeing. Our symbolic formal equality as active choosers is used as a strong counter-narrative to the many substantive inequalities that result. In this ubiquitous political bait-and-switch we are tempted in and placated by the powerful language of equality while living a hollowed-out distortion of this ideal.

The representative functions of choice can then naturalise and entrench these substantive inequalities, leaving members of oppressed groups battling negative representations that limit their substantive choices even further, as well as causing emotional and political isolation. To counter this, we must foster different ways of understanding choice, as well as different ways to think about people and their environments more generally. An alternative theory and ethics of the subject and their socio-political context – one that goes far beyond that of the liberal 'value of choice' literature – is required to effectively challenge these inequalities.

To avoid these regressive narratives, must egalitarians give up talking of choice and responsibility entirely? Though this chapter aimed to scrub away some of the glamour and romance of contemporary choice discourse and to put our choices firmly back in social context, I do not think we can give up on the concepts of choice and responsibility *altogether*; they are sometimes simply too useful and important. We want to be able to say that women are responsible for performing a disproportionate share of unpaid carework, or that they do not choose to risk sexual assault by what they wear or where they go, for example.

Over the next three chapters, I grapple with this situation. I argue that if egalitarians use the concepts of choice and responsibility, they must draw on them in careful and critical ways – but that egalitarian political philosophers have failed to do this all too frequently. And I propose we decentre choice from egalitarian approaches to

distributive justice.

### 3. THE POLITICS AND PHILOSOPHY OF AGENT RESPONSIBILITY

#### 3.1. Introduction

*We need to pay more attention to our responsibilities, as well as our rights... I want to see people taking greater personal responsibility for managing their own health.*

*It's about people choosing to look after themselves better, staying active and stopping smoking. Making better choices....*

*– Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (2018-Present)<sup>117</sup>*

The UK Health Secretary's views on the need for people to 'take responsibility' for their own health can be traced back to a lineage of thought that the radical neoliberal economist Gary Becker helped develop and took to its extreme. For Becker, 'most (if not all!) deaths are to some extent "suicides"' since 'they could have been postponed if more resources had been invested in prolonging life'; he thinks that because we all fail to make maximally healthy choices, all our deaths are, to some extent at least, self-authored.<sup>118</sup> Yet Simon Capewell, a professor of public health and policy, called the Health Secretary's focus on choice and personal responsibility 'victim blaming.'

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<sup>117</sup> The first sentence is a direct quote from a speech by Hancock (2018); the second is from his press release summarising the contents of this speech to the media (quoted in Campbell 2018).

<sup>118</sup> Becker (2013: 10).

‘People do not ‘choose’ obesity or diabetes or cancer’ Capewell insisted, ‘[t]hey have just been overwhelmed by a toxic environment.’<sup>119</sup>

In philosophical parlance, Capewell disagrees with Hancock and Becker about whether or not people are ‘agent responsible’ for their bad health. I am agent responsible for those outcomes I ‘author’ – those which ‘stem appropriately from’ or ‘suitably reflect’ my agency.<sup>120</sup> Agent responsibility, then, is a philosophical term of art designed to systematically unpack and carefully articulate the fuzzy folk concept of ‘choice.’

In Chapter 2, I argued that contemporary political discourse about choice often functions to reproduce, entrench, and then justify, structural inequalities along the lines of race, gender, and class. I ended the chapter with the following worry: how can egalitarians avoid complicity with these inegalitarian functions, given that relinquishing use of the concepts of choice and agent responsibility entirely seems an unattractive and nigh on impossible prospect? Chapters 3-6 address this worry. In these, I argue that though egalitarian political philosophers have too often fallen into uncritical uses of choice and/or agent responsibility, this can be avoided with a better understanding of how these concepts work.<sup>121</sup>

My argument goes as follows: Chapter 3 introduces the concept of agent responsibility and its role in egalitarian thought. Here, I argue that as far as political philosophers investigate the concept at all, their common apolitical understandings are incomplete – and in ways not amenable to a quick and simple fix. This chapter

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<sup>119</sup> Campbell (2018).

<sup>120</sup> Knight and Stemplowska (2011b: 12–13); Vallentyne (2008: 58).

<sup>121</sup> In Chapter 6 I advocate we decentre the concepts of choice and agent responsibility from egalitarian approaches to distributive justice; we may still use them but they cannot and should not serve as the primary or foundational motors of our distributive theories.

therefore illustrates the need for deeper investigation into the mechanisms of agent responsibility.

Chapter 4 undertakes this deeper investigation. There, I identify three indeterminacies within the standard definition of agent responsibility. All three indeterminacies are obscured by examples addressing only two possibly relevant agents responsible for two entirely separate outcomes, but all three re-emerge with vengeance within any actual political community. I analyse how we resolve these indeterminacies in our everyday, intuitive agent responsibility attributions.

This approach then gives me the tools necessary to suggest an alternative understanding of agent responsibility in Chapter 5 – an understanding that recognises the concept's important and unavoidable ethico-political dimensions. I show how this alternative understanding can resolve the indeterminacies outlined in Chapter 4, and how it reveals the possibility of more egalitarian conceptions of choice and responsibility than those outlined in Chapters 2-4. Finally, in Chapter 6, I tie up the threads of this long argument and explore its implications for how political philosophers can and should use the concepts of choice and agent responsibility.

As discussed in Chapter 2, some of the costs of choice can be put down to the internalisation of harmful norms by the choosers themselves. But, as I emphasised, this is only one part of the story. Examining the workings of agent responsibility over the next four chapters reveals how this concept – and its folk parallel, 'choice' – are able to play such a central and persuasive role in inequalitarian and conservative political thought, functioning as a powerful tool for displacing issues of structural injustice from political discourse. These chapters also suggest ways for egalitarians to best counter this.

### 3.2. Agent Responsibility in Politics and Philosophy

In the last few decades advanced liberal democracies have pushed a ‘responsibilising’ mode of government.<sup>122</sup> Within this mode of government, a focus on individual responsibility displaces structural issues of economic distribution and poverty: inequalities are portrayed as justified because they stem from failures of agent responsibility. For example, those claiming ‘job seekers’ allowance’ in the UK must demonstrate they are actively seeking work and willing to accept any job.<sup>123</sup> In this way, receipt of state benefits is made conditional on lacking any agent responsibility for unemployment, with agent responsibility for one’s unemployment assumed until proved otherwise.

Just as the concept of choice does much work in public political discourse, its philosophical parallel, agent responsibility, does much work within political philosophy. The term was developed within ‘responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism’ – a dominant contemporary strand of egalitarian thought that places significant weight on the moral significance of choice.<sup>124</sup> Responsibility-sensitive egalitarians view agent responsibility as the ‘first concept at the heart of debates about distributive justice and responsibility.’<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Rose (1996, 2000). See Chapter 2, Section 4 for discussion.

<sup>123</sup> UK Government (2013: 2).

<sup>124</sup> For an overview of contemporary responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism see Knight and Stemplowska (2011a).

<sup>125</sup> Knight and Stemplowska (2011b: 12). There are many different forms of responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism and the arguments of the next four chapters do not apply to every form of this theory. In particular, they do not apply to those interpretations of responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism which are grounded in concepts other than choice or agent responsibility. For example, my arguments are not aimed at ‘desert-catering’ interpretations, since these theories hold that desert, rather than choice, grounds consequential responsibility (e.g. Temkin 2011). Nor do they apply to ‘all-luck egalitarianism’ – an interpretation upon which responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism’s ‘anti-luckism’ takes precedence over its ‘pro-choicism’ (on these distinctions see footnote 25, p.17); accordingly, all-luck egalitarians deny any relevant distinction between option luck and brute luck (for discussion see Segall 2010: 45-57). I therefore address my arguments to a specific group of ‘pro-choicist’ theorists – those who see choice as a primary ground of consequential responsibility.

These theorists hold that to treat people as equals – to show them equal respect and concern – we must equalise their distributive share of opportunity for either welfare or resources.<sup>126</sup> They centre the concept of choice because they think that not to do so unjustly punishes the prudent and hardworking to care for the lazy, unfairly ignoring the moral significance of agent responsibility for outcomes.<sup>127</sup> Such theorists therefore often start from the idea that, under conditions of initial equality of opportunity, agent responsibility for a benefit or burden justifies leaving one to bear or enjoy that benefit or burden.<sup>128</sup> Agent responsibility is thus seen as a key determinant of just distributions, and attributions of agent responsibility as the raw data that a theory of justice must translate into just shares.<sup>129</sup>

Responsibility-sensitive egalitarians do not much discuss structural injustices of race, gender, and class. Most likely this is because, like all philosophers, they choose to specialise by working on some questions while acknowledging that there are other important questions they are not addressing. I have sympathy with this; we are all

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<sup>126</sup> They therefore think the ‘currency’ of egalitarian justice – the good of which people are entitled equal shares to – is either opportunity for welfare or opportunity for resources. On the ‘currency’ question, see Cohen (1989). The comfortable ease with which many egalitarians accepted this economistic framing of distributive justice is perhaps one example of how our neoliberal context has converted ‘the distinctly *political* character, meaning, and operation of democracy’s constituent elements into economic ones’ (Brown 2015: 17). In contrast to critical approaches to raced relations which use economistic objectifications to reveal and denaturalise raced distributions and critique raced social relations (e.g. ‘whiteness as property’ {Harris 1993}; ‘the wages of whiteness’ {Roediger 1999}), this responsibility-sensitive egalitarian objectification often naturalises structural inequalities (as argued in Chapter 4; I discuss Harris and Roediger in Chapter 7, Section 3.3, and Chapter 8, Section 4).

<sup>127</sup> E.g. Segall (2013: 44). For a counter-argument see Phillips (2004).

<sup>128</sup> Stemplowska (2009: 237) calls this the ‘luck egalitarian principle’. Though both appeal to the justificatory force of agent responsibility to determine who deserves what, responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism is not equivalent to political responsabilisation practices since responsibility-sensitive egalitarians require this initial ‘equal opportunities’ baseline for agent responsibility to justify an outcome.

<sup>129</sup> The term has seeped into other parts of political philosophy in place of the more common ‘choice’ too. For example, one prominent view in just war theory states that a person’s agent responsibility for imposing risks on others determines whether she has alienated her own right not to be harmed. See Lazar (2009: 702).

forced to leave important topics out of our work for a lack of time or space to adequately address them. However, this position assumes it is possible to undertake meaningful work about responsibility and equality without theorising (in much depth, at least) about structural injustices like these. Why might philosophers think this? Looking to the responsibility-sensitive egalitarian literature, two main assumptions appear to underly this belief.

First, most of these philosophers start their theorising from an imagined egalitarian baseline from which everybody begins their adult lives with access to equal opportunities; injustices like racism, sexism, and classism are assumed incompatible with such a baseline. For example, Ronald Dworkin simply stipulates that before egalitarian redistributive measures take place we must guarantee people's tastes and preferences are not prejudiced along racial lines.<sup>130</sup> He explains that if people suffer because of others' racial prejudices, this violates his requirement that peoples' tastes be free of prejudice. (In contrast, his egalitarianism is 'neutral' about those people disadvantaged because their skills are not valued by others and so cannot command as much market income.<sup>131</sup>)

Second, some responsibility-sensitive egalitarians seem to believe that structural injustices of race, gender, and class can easily be rectified through proper application of their preferred choice/compensation framework. In other words, they do not spend much time theorising these topics directly because they think that their work on equality and responsibility can solve problems of structural injustice quite straightforwardly. Carl Knight, for example, clearly takes such injustices very seriously. However, his discussion of them remains brief because he believes they

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<sup>130</sup> Dworkin (2002: 161–62). Dworkin (2003) rejects being labelled as a luck egalitarian. I include him in my discussion because, though he may not object to unlucky inequalities tout court, choice-sensitivity remains central to his theoretical approach.

<sup>131</sup> Dworkin (2002: 162). I am deeply sceptical of this approach but my reasons for scepticism rely on arguments I have yet to make; see Chapter 6, Section 2.



can be easily translated into his responsibility-sensitive choice/compensation framework.

During his short discussion about luck egalitarianism and race, he expresses surprise at Iris Marion Young's concern that luck egalitarianism cannot adequately grasp the problems of structural injustice.<sup>132</sup> Knight is confused: why would anyone worry that luck egalitarians would not take racial inequalities incredibly seriously, since 'one could hardly choose better cases to bring out the attractions of luck egalitarianism!'<sup>133</sup> According to Knight, race, like social class, is 'one of the most obvious sources of responsibility-insensitive inequalities, and one of the easiest to rectify.'<sup>134</sup> This welcome recognition of the centrality of racial injustice is paired with the strange claim that they are easy to rectify. The latter assertion appears to rest on Knight's confidence that responsibility and luck can easily be distinguished in non-racist ways.

Yet there are reasons to wonder whether things are as straightforward as Knight suggests. As argued, we need only look at contemporary politics to see how discourses about 'choice' often function to reproduce and justify structural inequalities along the lines of race, gender, and class. And, crucially, it cannot be taken for granted that philosophical approaches to agent responsibility will manage to avoid being tainted by similar problems without a healthy dose of caution. To see this, note that a few pages earlier in the same chapter Knight suggests using IQ tests to determine whether people are capable of agent responsibility, seemingly unaware of the long history of IQ tests being used as instruments of racial (and classed) control and violence.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> See Young (2011b).

<sup>133</sup> Knight (2009: 149).

<sup>134</sup> Knight (2009: 149).

<sup>135</sup> Knight (2009: 128).

IQ tests have been used to justify inequalities along the lines of class and race, to reinforce these inequalities by ‘shunting vast numbers of working class and minority children onto inferior and dead-end educational tracks’, and even to validate compulsory sterilisation laws.<sup>136</sup> They have proved so useful in shoring up racial and class hierarchies because of the prevalent underlying assumption that they measure only the inherent, fixed intelligence of the individual measured.<sup>137</sup> By assuming a naturalised, individualistic conception of intelligence these tests disguise judgements based on structural sexism, racism, and classism as politically neutral ‘scientific’ diagnoses.<sup>138</sup> This makes them well-suited to the justification and naturalisation of racist social structures, relations, and distributions.<sup>139</sup>

Therefore, Knight leans on IQ tests as a racially neutral measure of agents’ capacity for agent responsibility in the face of worrying evidence that it is nothing of the sort. This raises questions about his faith in the ease with which we can arrive at politically neutral (and specifically, non-racist, non-sexist, non-classist) ways to determine who is agent responsible for what. It also suggests one reason for avoiding a strict division of labour between ideal and non-ideal theorising on this

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<sup>136</sup> Rose *et al.* (1990: 87).

<sup>137</sup> For example, during World War I, the American Army tested immigrants’ IQs by asking them questions about US baseball teams, tennis rules, and manufacturers of US consumer goods (Rose *et al.* 1990: 88).

<sup>138</sup> Young’s original argument suggests that (among other things) the ‘distributive paradigm’ within political philosophy is animated by an overly individualistic worldview which depoliticises wider institutional structures and helps ‘forestall criticism of relations of power and culture in welfare capitalist society’ (2011a: 75). Chapters 4-5 can be read as a suggestion that the insufficiently politicised approaches to choice within one contemporary strand of the distributive paradigm - responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism – retains this harmful individualism and its depoliticising effects. My route to this conclusion runs through analysis of the concept of choice rather than distributions however, unlike Young’s arguments.

<sup>139</sup> Nor are such naturalisations confined to the past. Saini, documenting the recent resurgence of ‘race science’, was told by professor of biochemistry, Gerhard Meisenberg that ‘some countries are too cognitively challenged to prosper, that essentially they are poor because they are stupid. His only evidence was historical IQ test scores’ (Saini 2019: 159). Meisenberg is not the fringe figure we would wish him to be: he sat on the editorial board of the peer-reviewed academic journal *Intelligence* until 2018 (Saini 2018).

topic: a lack of awareness of the real-world mechanisms of structural injustice can lead to idealised theories which, if implemented, risk cementing problematic inequalities rather than challenging them – in ways entirely at odds with their aims and motivations.<sup>140</sup> The IQ case alone cannot support this broad claim about the need to avoid strict ideal/non-ideal divisions of labour on this topic, but it does suggest that this claim warrants further investigation.

Knight is not the only theorist who portrays structural injustices as easily rectified by appeal to responsibility-sensitive egalitarian frameworks. Asked how his theory handles gender inequalities, Dworkin argued that ‘if a woman were willing to take a pill that would transform her into a man, then she would need to be compensated for being a woman’ – if she would not choose to take the pill, she must not envy men to a sufficient degree to warrant compensation.<sup>141</sup> Shlomi Segall similarly argues that someone denied a job because of her skin colour but offered an adequate compensation package – defined as one that they would choose above the job – no longer suffers racist discrimination.<sup>142</sup> Like Knight, both these theorists therefore think that appeal to agent responsibility (or hypothetical agent responsibility) can adequately solve issues of structural injustice.

In sum, then, it is certainly not the case that responsibility-sensitive egalitarians condone racism, classism, or sexism. Rather, they often assume these issues away in their idealisation, to be dealt with by other theorists. When they do discuss these structural injustices, theorists like Knight, Dworkin, and Segall portray them as straightforwardly solvable through recourse to agent responsibility. However,

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<sup>140</sup> It might be argued that since Knight is undertaking ideal theorising, it is unfair to consider the effects of his proposals in the real (racist) world. I return to the possibility of non-racist, non-classist IQ tests in Chapter 6, Section 2.1; for now I note only that if ideal theorists do not intend for their theories to have real world application I am unsure why they make concrete policy proposals like this.

<sup>141</sup> As reported in Robeyns (2003: 541).

<sup>142</sup> Segall (2013: 126–27).

Knight's IQ example suggests that what might at first look like elegant ways to determine agent responsibility are in fact tied up with the very structural injustices we are concerned to combat. Given that, as argued, responsabilisation has become central to the reproduction of real-world structural inequalities, we therefore have strong political and philosophical reasons to explore the concept of agent responsibility further. Specifically, it is worth exploring how exactly we tell when a particular person is agent responsible for a particular outcome.

### *Political-philosophical analyses of agent responsibility*

Recall that I am agent responsible for those outcomes I 'author' – those which 'stem appropriately from' or 'suitably reflect' my agency.<sup>143</sup> Surprisingly, despite the prominence of agent responsibility within egalitarian political philosophy, the opaque notion of authorship the concept rests on, and the significance of its folk parallel 'choice' within real world politics, political philosophers have not much interrogated its workings.

Instead, theorists tend to take one of three broad (and overlapping) approaches to determining who is agent responsible for what.<sup>144</sup> First, some briefly acknowledge the complexity of working out exactly what we author before bracketing the issue.<sup>145</sup> Let's call this *the non-analysis*. There is absolutely nothing wrong with the non-analysis in and of itself; we all have to bracket certain issues in order to focus on our chosen topics. It is only that we now have reason to think this particular bracketed topic warrants further investigation.

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<sup>143</sup> Knight and Stemplowska (2011b: 12–13); Vallentyne (2008: 58).

<sup>144</sup> McTernan's (2015) 'practice-based' view of responsibility provides an important exception. However, she does not analyse agent responsibility specifically; rather her account is designed to capture an explicitly moralised form of responsibility which implies accountability and licences reactive attitudes of praise and blame (see McTernan 2015: 15, footnote 1).

<sup>145</sup> E.g. Segall (2013: 3); Stemplowska (2009: 240); Tan (2008: 669). Nothing stands in the way of these philosophers accepting my political account of agent responsibility.

Second, some political philosophers defend this bracketing by implying that analysis of the concept lies beyond our remit because the term is borrowed from outside political philosophy. For example, Gerald Cohen thinks putting agent responsibility at the centre of distributive justice may well ‘subordinate’ political philosophy to ‘metaphysical questions.’<sup>146</sup> Richard Arneson suggests we ‘leave this issue to the free will and determinism metaphysicians’, and others echo his suggestion that the problem of understanding what we are agent responsible for is reducible to the metaphysical problem of free will.<sup>147</sup>

Because of this, Knight proposes that a committee of metaphysicians oversee public policy decisions involving agent responsibility attributions.<sup>148</sup> In a rare article directly engaged with this topic, Peter Vallentyne suggests agent responsibility be calculated using ‘objective’ probability changes, and labels his approach a ‘metaphysical (or ledger) conception.’<sup>149</sup> When discussed at all, then, the job of analysing agent responsibility appears to sit well outside political philosophers’ remit and expertise. Let’s call this *the metaphysical analysis*. (Note that the conception of metaphysics invoked here appears to preclude legitimate overlap between normative political theory and metaphysics.<sup>150</sup>)

Third, other philosophers work from a kind of ‘common-sense’ account of agent responsibility. Dworkin, for example, relies on ‘ordinary ethical experience’ to distinguish ‘choice’ from ‘circumstance.’<sup>151</sup> This is because he wants to carry the

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<sup>146</sup> Cohen (1989: 934).

<sup>147</sup> Arneson (2004: 10). Knight (2006: 185) likewise suggests that a solution to the free will problem would fully dictate who is owed what. Smilansky (1997: 157-158) argues that responsibility-sensitive egalitarian justice ‘crucially depends’ on our answer to the free will problem (not mentioning anything else it may depend on).

<sup>148</sup> Knight (2006).

<sup>149</sup> Vallentyne (2008: 59).

<sup>150</sup> On this see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.

<sup>151</sup> Dworkin (2002: 289-90; 323).

'familiar structure of our personal morality... into politics intact.'<sup>152</sup> Let's call this *the common-sense analysis*.<sup>153</sup>

Though some philosophers formally espouse either the non-analysis or the metaphysical analysis, many nonetheless draw on examples involving common-sense attributions of agent responsibility in order to build their theories of justice.<sup>154</sup> This suggests an (understandable) prevailing assumption that even if we may not know *exactly* who is agent responsible for what, we can expect this to roughly follow the common-sense analysis. Because of this assumption, in practice, the common-sense analysis of agent responsibility underlies much responsibility-sensitive theorising.<sup>155</sup>

Over the next three chapters, and against both the metaphysical and the common-sense analyses, I build an alternative *political analysis* of agent responsibility. I argue that, far from being beyond the scope of political philosophy, it is vital that we recognise the important and inescapable political dimensions of this concept. One of the upshots of my account is that we cannot leave determinations of agent responsibility solely to

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<sup>152</sup> Dworkin (2002: 294).

<sup>153</sup> I include Roemer's (1993) approach in this category; he suggests we collectively vote on what constitutes a responsibility-undermining factor (e.g. ethnicity, family history, etc.) and then use these votes to assess groups of peoples' responsibility for outcomes. Though he calls his approach 'political not metaphysical' (Roemer 1993: 149), its political aspect seems to begin and end with asking society to vote in this way. Because of this, his conception of responsibility is explicitly designed to reflect common sense responsibility attributions rather than to encourage any substantive political critique of these.

<sup>154</sup> E.g. Knight (2009) who argues for the metaphysical account (178-188) but frequently theorises about responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism on the basis of common-sense authorship attributions (e.g. 6-7; 17; 137-140; 149). Segall appeals to the non-analysis (2013: 3) but then goes on to rely on intuitive common-sense judgements of authorship (e.g. 45-63); Stemplowska does likewise (e.g. 2009: 240). Cohen endorses the metaphysical analysis but also argues using common-sense authorship attributions (e.g. 1989: 936).

<sup>155</sup> Exceptions include those luck egalitarian moments of theorising the normative consequences of hard determinism (e.g. Knight 2006: 179; Arneson 1989: 86-87 - who then quickly states that 'in practice... rough and ready judgements' of responsibility and opportunity can be made).

common sense or to metaphysicians; any political philosophers drawing on the concept must engage in debates about who is agent responsible for what.

To make this argument, I bracket other important questions. For example, I here simply accept that the performance of intentional action captures what we mean by ‘agency’. I do not discuss the metaphysical problem of free will.<sup>156</sup> Nor can I do justice to debates over differing metaphysical accounts of causation.<sup>157</sup> I assume the possibility of causation by omission in cases where an agent has a responsibility as obligation they fail to fulfil; if I am obligated to water your plants while you are away because I promised to, I author your plants’ deaths through my omission to follow through. When I talk of responsibility without specifying which kind, I mean agent responsibility. And, since I start from a definition that states I am agent responsible for those outcomes I ‘author’, I use ‘*x* authors *y*’ to mean just that ‘*x* is agent responsible for *y*’.<sup>158</sup>

### 3.3. A Standard Analysis of Agent Responsibility

I am agent responsible for something if I ‘author’ it or ‘bring it about qua free agent.’<sup>159</sup> Attempts to taxonomise the many slippery meanings of responsibility distinguish agent responsibility from four other kinds: *causal* (I caused *x*), *consequential* (the burdens/benefits that stem from *x* are justly mine to shoulder/enjoy), *moral* (I am blameworthy/praiseworthy for *x*), and *responsibility as obligation* (I have obligations regarding *x*).<sup>160</sup> You may cause the window to break but if I pushed you into it, you do not seem agent responsible – I brought it about, not you. It seems unfair to charge you

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<sup>156</sup> Not because I think it has *no* relevance, but to highlight the many other issues which have enormous relevance to determinations of agent responsibility yet are almost always overlooked.

<sup>157</sup> E.g. Schaffer (2016).

<sup>158</sup> Knight and Stemplowska (2011b: 12–13).

<sup>159</sup> Knight and Stemplowska (2011b: 12–13). ‘Bringing about qua free agent’ is distinguished from causal responsibility through the involvement of agency.

<sup>160</sup> Knight and Stemplowska (2011b: 11).

for its repair, suggesting you lack consequential responsibility too.<sup>161</sup> If you promise to ensure I stop breaking windows, you acquire a responsibility as obligation: you become responsible for keeping me in check.

Causal responsibility is necessary but not sufficient for agent responsibility. As shown by your lack of authorship of the broken window, the outcome must also ‘stem appropriately’ from or ‘suitably reflect’ your agency.<sup>162</sup> Because agency is often held to consist in the performance of intentional actions, one way to ensure this connection is to add an intention requirement so that one is responsible for x if and only if one caused and intended x.

However, in paradigmatic political-philosophical examples of agent responsibility the agent – a mountaineer recklessly climbing without insurance<sup>163</sup>, a motorbike rider wearing no helmet to feel the wind in his hair<sup>164</sup>, or a lazy beach bum<sup>165</sup> – does not *intend* their resulting precarity or injuries. They intend to climb mountains, drive without a helmet, or spend a day surfing, and may even explicitly hope not to become injured or destitute. As they are nevertheless held paradigmatically responsible for their need of support, the definition is commonly broadened by adding some form of ‘reasonable foreseeability’ condition.<sup>166</sup> It is this extension beyond directly intended outcomes that makes the concept unique.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> If I intentionally pushed you, I seem morally responsible for the breakage. But moral and agent responsibility can come apart since some outcomes do not seem to have a moral character; you are agent responsible for your latest self-portrait, though likely not morally blameworthy or praiseworthy for it.

<sup>162</sup> Knight and Stemplowska (2011b: 12); Vallentyne (2008: 58).

<sup>163</sup> Stemplowska (2009: 252).

<sup>164</sup> Fleurbaey (1995: 40). The same is true of many paradigm public political invocations of responsibility; no one *intends* to get diabetes, for example.

<sup>165</sup> Hirose and Segall (2016).

<sup>166</sup> E.g. Stemplowska (2013b: 404); Vallentyne (2008: 61); Dworkin (2002: 73); Rakowski (1991: 74).

<sup>167</sup> Hence my focus on the class of cases where an agent is causally responsible for a reasonably foreseeable consequence of an intended action. Responsibility *stemming* from intentional action, rather than intentional action itself, is my primary concern. The political dimensions of intention have been persuasively documented elsewhere – e.g. Bartky (1988); Chambers (2010).



It is fairly standard, then, to assume a definition which states that one is agent responsible for *x* if and only if one was causally responsible for *x* and *x* was either intentional or a reasonably foreseeable consequence of an intentional action.<sup>168</sup> Let's start by interpreting the causal and reasonable foreseeability conditions of this standard model to be apolitical. This seems especially plausible in the case of the causal condition. Causation, after all, is 'commonly held to be a paradigmatic example of a natural and so entirely non-normative relation.'<sup>169</sup>

Note that the reasonable foreseeability condition is hypothetical – the agent need not have *actually foreseen* the possible consequence. Rather, we judge it reasonable to expect their foreseeing it. This condition is therefore indeterminate until we decide which consequences it is reasonable to expect agents to foresee stemming from their actions. An apolitical understanding of reasonable foreseeability would count all and only what would be foreseen by a reasonably competent and knowledgeable agent, where these competencies and this knowledge are based on average levels of skill, effort, knowledge, and common sense.<sup>170</sup> This apolitical understanding would maintain that, though normative in the loose sense that it involves social norms, this map of foreseeability is nonetheless not *political*; it just reflects the way the world is. So far, so standard. However, I now turn to a case which reveals things to be more complicated than this standard analysis of agent responsibility can account for.

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<sup>168</sup> Many theorists adopt similar definitions of agent responsibility - e.g. Stemplowska (2013b: 404); Vallentyne (2008: 61); Dworkin (2002: 73); Rakowski (1991: 74).

<sup>169</sup> McGrath (2005: 125).

<sup>170</sup> It might be thought a better apolitical characterisation understands an outcome as reasonably foreseeable if we would generally expect agents to foresee that outcome given the totality of that particular agent's evidence. However, this understanding cannot explain cases where we assume the agent in question will undertake a certain amount of investigation before acting but they fail to do so. For example, someone who turns into oncoming traffic because they neglect to check whether the road was clear will not have evidence of the oncoming traffic; despite this, the resulting crash is a reasonably foreseeable consequence of her actions because we expect people to check whether the coast is clear before pulling out.

### ***The case of sexual assault:***

*The sexual assault had been so clear, but instead, here I was at the trial, answering questions like: How old are you? How much do you weigh? What did you eat that day? Well what did you have for dinner? Who made dinner? Did you drink with dinner? No, not even water? When did you drink? How much did you drink? What container did you drink out of? Who gave you the drink? How much do you usually drink? Who dropped you off at this party? At what time? But where exactly? What were you wearing?...*

*Regretting drinking is not the same as regretting sexual assault. We were both drunk, the difference is I did not take off your pants and underwear, touch you inappropriately, and run away. That's the difference.<sup>171</sup>*

Suppose a woman goes to a bar alone to have a couple of drinks, knowing that doing so is risky. On leaving she is followed and sexually assaulted. Is she co-responsible for this assault? Our current definition suggests she is, for what woman gets to drinking age without being warned frequently that women who have been drinking, or who go home alone (or who wear revealing clothes, etc.) put themselves at risk of sexual assault?<sup>172</sup> Rape statistics are often used to threaten women into this kind of 'healthy caution.'<sup>173</sup> If we think it common-sense to expect that drinking alone while female carries risks of sexual assault, then our current approach counts assault as a reasonably foreseeable consequence of acting thus.

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<sup>171</sup> Extract from the victim statement in the sexual assault case against Stanford student Brock Turner – as quoted in Baker (2016).

<sup>172</sup> On drinking see, e.g., Smith (2014) and Schulte (2015). Similarly, the police and judiciary often highlight the assault risks involved in women doing activities like using headphones (BBC News 2018), accepting a drink at a party (Petter 2019), being drunk (Guardian Staff 2017), or walking home alone (Keeling 2015). A recent survey suggests many would go further than assigning only causal or agent responsibility: 38% of men and 34% of women hold a woman who goes out late wearing a short skirt, gets drunk, and is sexually assaulted as partly or wholly to blame for the assault (Taaffe 2017: 10).

<sup>173</sup> Hall (2004: 8, 11).

Mainstream political philosophy appears to agree with public political discourse here. For example, in a similar case (where a woman risks a mini-skirt rather than lone drinking) Zofia Stemplowska holds our woman agent responsible for her disadvantage ‘to some degree.’<sup>174</sup> In other words, our woman is deemed to co-author the assault to some unspecified extent. (Importantly, Stemplowska does not think this degree of co-responsibility *justifies* the resulting disadvantage.<sup>175</sup>) Similarly, Vallentyne holds agents responsible for outcomes to the extent that their autonomous choice increased the chance of the outcome and they ‘should reasonably have’ believed this to be so.<sup>176</sup> Because of this, women who knowingly risk drinking alone would again be held to co-author any resultant sexual assault.<sup>177</sup>

Yet feminists insist that women are *not* co-responsible for such outcomes. Instead, we assert things like: ‘What happened to me had nothing to do with where I walked or what I wore, and everything to do with the actions of two men’;<sup>178</sup> or, ‘No matter what someone has done or failed to do, they did not cause their sexual assault.’<sup>179</sup> Our current definition of agent responsibility struggles to make any sense of such claims; it assumes we are responsible for *all* commonly foreseeable outcomes of our intentional actions, therefore dismissing the feminist contention that our assault

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<sup>174</sup> Stemplowska (2009: 245). In fairness, this understanding of responsibility is far from unique within responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism; unlike most, Stemplowska simply acknowledges its more controversial consequences.

<sup>175</sup> Stemplowska (2009: 244-245). In this she departs from other, ‘purer’ responsibility-sensitive egalitarian understandings of agent responsibility, since on her view agent responsibility is only necessary, not sufficient, to justify disadvantages. She argues that agent responsibility is only sufficient to justify disadvantages if an appropriately egalitarian ‘opportunity structure’ is in place: if our society allows only a certain range of choices and connects these choices to outcomes in ways acceptable to egalitarians. I contrast Stemplowska’s approach with mine in Chapter 5, Section 2.1.

<sup>176</sup> Vallentyne (2008: 61, 64).

<sup>177</sup> In fact, due to a quirk of Vallentyne’s (2008: 70-71) account, the more fearful and indisposed towards going to the bar they were, the greater the degree of their co-authorship of the assault.

<sup>178</sup> Remeikis (2018).

<sup>179</sup> Eastern Michigan University (2018).

victim does not co-author her assault.

Because I take these feminist claims about authorship seriously, I assume that our understanding of agent responsibility should be able to accommodate them.<sup>180</sup> One obvious way to improve our definition in order to make room for the feminist understanding of this case is to politicise the reasonable foreseeability condition in some way. (The idea that the reasonable foreseeability requirement might have some political dimensions seems far more plausible than the idea that the causal responsibility requirement does, after all.) Two possible political readings of this foreseeability requirement suggest themselves.

First, we might claim that knowledge is dispersed unevenly in societies in ways which reflect political power and status hierarchies. What is common sense to some or most people may not be commonly known to certain marginalised groups, who are then held to unfair 'reasonable foreseeability' standards. Take classed forms of knowledge about career advancement, for example: perhaps many middle- and upper-class people know that 'it's good to be right, but it's better to be funny' in prestigious industries like journalism, but few working class people know this.<sup>181</sup> If a working class person misses a promotion because they avoid all humour in their interview, we want to be able to fight the idea that he should reasonably have foreseen this outcome.

This political dimension of reasonable foreseeability is certainly important, since 'practices of ignorance are often intertwined with practices of oppression and

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<sup>180</sup> In Chapter 5, I am able to give a full, reasoned defence of feminist authorship claims regarding sexual assault; for now, I assume they are correct in order to suggest the need for a deep-reaching overhaul of our approach to responsibility attributions.

<sup>181</sup> As one journalist told researchers analysing the UK's class pay gap (Friedman & Laurison 2019).

exclusion.<sup>182</sup> However this politicisation of reasonable foreseeability does not help shed light on our assault case. There, the problem is not that women do not know the risks of drinking alone; we know these risks all too well and yet still – so us feminists insist – our woman does not co-author the assault.

Therefore, to deal with the assault case it is necessary to consider a second, deeper politicisation of the reasonable foreseeability condition. I end this chapter by suggesting that this deeper politicisation of reasonable foreseeability in fact reveals the need to politicise agent responsibility's causal requirement as well. Specifically, this case suggests that we must add to our understanding of agent responsibility the idea that common-sense knowledge about what causes sexual assault itself reflects problematic power hierarchies. While the *dispersal* of knowledge can certainly be of political concern, the assault case suggests that the relevant common-sense knowledge *itself* has important political dimensions – or so I will now argue.

To see this first note that in the assault case we tend to single out just the perpetrator and the victim as the only plausible authors. Their actions, and theirs alone, commonly constitute the focus of our investigations when deciding who is responsible for the assault. Yet though our woman's decision to knowingly take a risk causally contributed to this outcome in a foreseeable way, so did countless other intentional actions and omissions barely ever mentioned in such cases: the bar owner risked opening his bar that night, despite our knowledge that alcohol can facilitate such assaults;<sup>183</sup> the local authority made licensing and policing decisions in the face of similar knowledge; the perpetrator's parents trusted their adult son with independence despite knowing that 99% of perpetrators of sexual assault are men;<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Tuana and Sullivan (2006: 1).

<sup>183</sup> Abbey *et al.* (2004).

<sup>184</sup> See Flatley (2018) for UK statistics on the gender of (reported) sexual assault perpetrators. Men who commit sexual assault are a small minority; nonetheless, here I draw on an idea similar to Crabb (2015) when she argues that 'a woman gets killed by her male partner every single week,

the perpetrator's school failed adequately to teach him the importance of consent; and the victim's school failed to teach her more caution; the list could go on.

All these actions and omissions form necessary parts of the causal web leading up to the assault in question, and all these agents could have foreseen the risks their actions ran. It is common knowledge that alcohol facilitates sexual assault – after all, this fact is frequently what prefaces warnings to women not to drink<sup>185</sup> – and that men are far more likely to commit assault than women. Yet we would never say that the bar owner, the perpetrator's parents, or the victim's school co-authored the assault. This is because we do not tend to think of the actions of the bar owner, the parents, or the schools as being *causally responsible* for the assault. At most, they are background enabling conditions of it. Asked what caused the assault, we would barely ever say 'oh, the perpetrator's parents granted him normal adult levels of independence' or 'well, the bar-owner opened his bar that night.'

In contrast, the idea that women who take unnecessary risks (like drinking alone while female or wearing a short skirt) and perpetrators committing sexual assault are causally responsible for the outcome of sexual assaults are familiar.<sup>186</sup> In this way, common-sense ideas of reasonable foreseeability in fact rely on common-sense ideas about causal responsibility: if we commonly think action *x* risks causing or will

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and somehow that doesn't qualify as a tools-down national crisis even though if a man got killed by a shark every week we'd probably arrange to have the ocean drained.' In England and Wales, roughly 11 of the most serious sexual offences (rape, attempted rape or sexual assault by penetration) occur every hour – it is thus similarly epidemic (Rape Crisis n.d.). Just as Crabb's point does not rely on the majority of sharks killing people but rather on the harm that those who do kill cause, my point does not rely on the majority of men committing assault. Nor am I arguing that we ought to deny men normal adult independence; I think most of us would agree that the costs of granting men full independence (i.e. sexual assaults) are outweighed by the costs of not doing so (i.e. half the population deprived of their basic liberties). I am simply highlighting the many others who knowingly took risks (however small) leading up to the assault outcome, yet who never get considered as its co-authors (to any degree), and to explore why this selection works as it does.

<sup>185</sup> E.g. Smith (2014); Schulte (2015).

<sup>186</sup> For examples of this familiar idea of the causes of sexual assault see footnote 172 (p.64).

cause outcome  $y$ , we will think it reasonable to foresee that doing action  $x$  risks or will result in outcome  $y$ .

This fits feminist statements about assault too. Recall, for example, ‘what happened to me had nothing to do with where I walked or what I wore, and everything to do with the actions of two men’ or, ‘no matter what someone has done or failed to do, they did not cause their sexual assault.’<sup>187</sup> (More generally, Fanflick includes the idea that ‘the victim did something to cause the rape’ in her list of common rape myths.<sup>188</sup>) These are not statements about the gendered dispersal of common-sense knowledge. Rather, these statements focus on causal responsibility – they are claims about whose actions are causally responsible for sexual assault and whose are not. Therefore, to politicise the reasonable foreseeability condition so that it can successfully handle the assault case, we have to base this foreseeability on a sufficiently politicised understanding of causal responsibility.

Seeing reasonable foreseeability’s reliance on causal responsibility also lets us be more specific about what the deeper politicisation of the reasonable foreseeability condition mentioned above might mean. I initially suggested that the common-sense knowledge we base our judgements of reasonable foreseeability on can have political dimensions, but now I can be more specific: it is common-sense knowledge of causal responsibility in particular which appears to have these political dimensions.

Let’s take stock. Our understanding of agent responsibility cannot make sense of the assault case via the shallower political interpretation of the reasonable foreseeability condition. And the deeper politicisation of reasonable foreseeability seems to require a political understanding of the causal condition too – an understanding which recognises that common-sense views about what counts as a cause and what counts

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<sup>187</sup> Remeikis (2018); Eastern Michigan University (2018).

<sup>188</sup> Fanflick (2007: 17).

as merely a background enabling condition can be and are affected by political power hierarchies. If our analysis of agent responsibility is to adequately handle feminist approaches to the assault case, it must therefore be based on interpretations of reasonable foreseeability and causal responsibility that recognise this.

At this point it may feel like we must have taken a misstep somewhere; as I mentioned, causation is supposed to be a paradigmatically natural – i.e. non-normative and so, certainly not political – concept. Surely there is simply one politically-neutral fact of the matter about who is causally responsible for the assault, and therefore who should have reasonably foreseen it? Granted, this may still be true; the assault example only provides a *prima facie* case against the standard model of responsibility and illustrates the complexity of altering this model to take feminist claims about assault authorship seriously (as I think we need to). However, in the next two chapters I go further. There, I show that an understanding of causal responsibility which recognises its pragmatic and normative-political dimensions is both possible, plausible, and necessary. And, I suggest, our understanding of agent responsibility works best when paired with such a politicised understanding of its causal requirement.

### **3.4. Conclusion: Reasons to Look Beyond the Standard Analysis**

In Chapter 2 I argued that a focus on individual choice can serve to justify structural inequalities by portraying them as stemming from failures of choice: simply individual ‘bad choices’ rather than injustices. This chapter introduced the concept of agent responsibility – the philosophical term of art meant to capture our relationship to those outcomes we have chosen – and its role in certain strands of egalitarian political thought.

Motivated by the harmful consequences of ‘choice’ discourses within real-world



politics outlined in Chapter 2, I examined how these egalitarians tend to handle structural injustices. Using Knight's proposal that IQ be used to measure when someone is capable of agent responsibility, I suggested that race-, gender-, and class-neutral analyses of exactly who is agent responsible for what may not be as straightforward as they first appear.

After outlining how responsibility-sensitive egalitarians theorise (or do not theorise, as is often the case) how agent responsibility attributions work, I attempted to pin down exactly who is agent responsible for what. Working from a standard 'intention, causal responsibility, plus reasonable foreseeability' model of agent responsibility, I examined the case of sexual assault. I argued that this standard model seemed unable to make sense of feminist claims about how women do not co-author their own sexual assaults by risking actions like drinking alcohol, wearing miniskirts, or walking home alone.

To try to make sense of these feminist claims, I suggested we politicise our understanding of agent responsibility. But a shallow politicisation of the concept's reasonable foreseeability condition – which only recognises that the dispersal of knowledge can be shaped by political hierarchies – did not do the trick. To make sense of these feminist claims about agent responsibility, I argued, we need to understand our knowledge of causal responsibility itself to have important political dimensions. This suggests we must politicise our understanding of agent responsibility's causal requirement as well as its reasonable foreseeability requirement.<sup>189</sup>

A quick fix of the standard model of agent responsibility through simple alterations

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<sup>189</sup> Perhaps this is not surprising. The outcomes it is reasonable to foresee arising from an action are all and only those that action will cause or risks causing. If properly picking out cases of reasonable foreseeability looks to have important political dimensions, this suggests picking out cases of causal responsibility might too.

to our understanding of the reasonable foreseeability condition is therefore insufficient; further-reaching reforms are required to properly understand how and why we attribute responsibility in the ways that we do, and how we are to understand and adjudicate debates involving conflicting authorship attributions.

The next chapter looks at how to supplement this standard model to give us this understanding. There, I identify three indeterminacies in the standard account, and outline how we unthinkingly resolve these indeterminacies in common-sense, intuitive responsibility attributions. In Chapter 5 I then build on this account to outline how and why, in normative political debates, attributions of agent responsibility have inescapable normative political dimensions. What should be clear already, however, is that determining who chooses what outcomes and why is far from straightforward.

## 4. COMMON-SENSE RESPONSIBILITY ATTRIBUTIONS: THEORISING EVERYDAY PRACTICE

*We will need to confront Britain's culture of irresponsibility and that will be hard to take for many people. And we will have to tear down Labour's big government bureaucracy, ripping up its time-wasting, money-draining, responsibility-sapping nonsense. – David Cameron<sup>190</sup>*

*Let this be our message - common sense for the common good. – David Cameron<sup>191</sup>*

### 4.1. Introduction

Political arguments and economic exhortations based on the significance of individual choice and responsibility are widespread: they pop up everywhere from public health to beauty to racialised poverty.<sup>192</sup> And the trend rolls on within liberal egalitarian political philosophy, albeit importantly softened by caveats promising initially equal distributions. Here, responsibility-sensitive egalitarians prefer to talk in terms of 'agent responsibility': the philosophical term for what one chooses or 'authors.' I am deemed agent responsible for those outcomes which 'stem

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<sup>190</sup> Cameron (2009).

<sup>191</sup> As quoted in Hall & O'Shea (2013a: 8).

<sup>192</sup> Campbell (2018); Dove US (2015); Coates (2013).

appropriately from' or 'suitably reflect' my agency.<sup>193</sup> These egalitarians debate whether *any* unconditional public goods and services can be justified, given that these would be insensitive to individuals' differing personal choices and therefore insensitive to differing levels of agent responsibility for their needs.<sup>194</sup>

But how to tell exactly what we are agent responsible for? As I suggested in Chapter 3, this is not as clear as it might first seem. In this chapter I argue that standard understandings of agent responsibility contain three important indeterminacies. I then explore how we resolve these indeterminacies in everyday practice, where we frequently make instinctive and determinate responsibility attributions. I argue that these instinctive responsibility attributions rely on certain common-sense beliefs: beliefs about which agents exist in the political sphere and what responsibilities as obligations they hold to one another, as well as beliefs about how to demarcate the public, economically-productive sphere from the private, unproductive sphere.

Importantly, I do not endorse the common-sense resolutions outlined in this chapter. Just because they, and the beliefs underlying them, are widespread does not mean we should uncritically accept them. In fact, in Chapter 5 I argue against any such

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<sup>193</sup> Knight and Stemplowska (2011b: 12-13); Vallentyne (2008: 58). Agent responsibility is a philosophical term of art designed to systematically unpack and articulate the fuzzy folk concept of choice.

<sup>194</sup> Knight (2015) surveys this debate, finding four avenues unpromising. He argues that a further three avenues *do* allow responsibility-sensitive egalitarians to respect the moral significance of choice while also providing (what he claims to be) unconditional public goods and services, by: (a) noting that I might be a different person when I made the choice to when I suffer its consequences, effectively rending the choice someone else's – someone who flips out of existence before they can bear their choice's consequences (though note that this makes public provision conditional on not being identical to one's past self); (b) allowing people to suffer the *expected* consequences of their choices, rather than the actual consequences of their choices (making public provision conditional on always making choices we expect to go well, despite the fact that such options may not always exist); or, (c) by noting that we do not know if people have free will, so we can actually most safely respect the moral significance of choice by not letting people bear the full consequences of their choices after all – instead we make a 'best guess'. Knight's (2015: 132) referencing suggests we do this by recourse to a panel of metaphysicians, making public provision conditional on this panel's conclusions.

uncritical acceptance. There, I use the descriptive account of how we do in fact attribute responsibility developed in this chapter to show the importance of subjecting these common-sense resolutions to normative political critique. (Chapter 5 therefore builds directly on this chapter, insisting that we can and must advocate determinate responsibility attributions resting on *egalitarian good sense* rather than common sense.)

In this chapter, when I talk of responsibility without specifying which kind, I mean to refer to agent responsibility. And, since I work from a definition of agent responsibility which understands me to be responsible for those outcomes I ‘author’, I use authorship and responsibility synonymously.<sup>195</sup>

### **4.2. Three Cases: Sexual Assault, Homelessness, and Unpaid Carework**

This chapter and the next revolve around three central cases: in addition to the case of sexual assault introduced in Chapter 3, I also examine cases of homelessness and unpaid carework. Though all these examples are adapted from political-philosophical literature on choice, each has important real-world parallels. First, recall Zofia Stemplowska’s assertion that a woman who risks wearing a miniskirt co-authors any resulting sexual assault ‘to some degree.’<sup>196</sup> This view is uncomfortably close to common claims that women who wear ‘provocative’ clothing are ‘asking for it.’

Second, take the case of two men, both previously rehoused by the state after a flood and both again in need of only one remaining flat. Ben lost his state-allocated flat to

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<sup>195</sup> Knight and Stemplowska (2011b: 12-13).

<sup>196</sup> Stemplowska (2009: 245). The understanding of responsibility informing this conclusion is far from unique within responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism. Stemplowska does not believe that the sexual assault victim ought to bear the burdens of the assault.

a fire because, knowing the risks, he left a candle alight and went out. Adam lost his due to a faulty cooker fire.<sup>197</sup> It first seems clear that Ben, unlike Adam, is responsible for his homelessness, and this can prompt us to think Adam should get the remaining flat; such examples are commonly used to motivate exactly this kind of conclusion.<sup>198</sup>

The real-world parallel of irresponsibly risking a fire is irresponsibly failing to secure regular paid employment. In the UK, for example, a previous Labour Housing Minister suggested evicting social housing tenants if they could not prove they were actively seeking work.<sup>199</sup> She wanted the right to housing to become (supposedly) sensitive to tenants' choices, rather than inalienable.<sup>200</sup> This policy has since become reality: unemployed claimants now risk losing housing support if they cannot prove they have spent 35 hours a week that month looking for work.<sup>201</sup> Successive Conservative governments have also thinned out people eligible for social housing assistance by broadening the kinds of behaviour that count as 'intentional homelessness' – if you are deemed intentionally homeless, local authorities are not legally obligated to help rehouse you.<sup>202</sup>

Third, suppose Sylvia is not formally employed. She cooks for her partner, cleans their house, washes his clothes, administers household bills and repairs, provides

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<sup>197</sup> Adapted from Stemplowska (2009: 242).

<sup>198</sup> E.g. Kymlicka (2002: 72-73); Knight (2015: 126-128); Segall (2013: 44). Stemplowska (2009: 242) takes a slightly different tack to the common responsibility-sensitive egalitarian uses of such cases. While she does use this example to provoke the intuition that, other things being equal, Adam should get the remaining flat she goes on to argue this does not mean we *always* ought to bear the burdens of what we are responsible for.

<sup>199</sup> Wintour (2008).

<sup>200</sup> Dwyer (2004) discusses increasing welfare conditionality in the UK. Whiteford (2013) outlines New Labour's mixed record on street homelessness, including their forays into conditionality and responsibilisation. Hodkinson and Robbins (2013) put this into historical perspective, highlighting the centrality of housing reform to the neoliberal project in the UK.

<sup>201</sup> Cain (2016).

<sup>202</sup> Hodkinson & Robbins (2013).

emotional care when he gets home, and disproportionately maintains their social and familial networks. Her partner works full time and Sylvia depends financially on his salary. Cases like Sylvia's are a point of contention for responsibility-sensitive egalitarians, constituting the 'problem of vulnerable dependent caretakers.'<sup>203</sup> Since Sylvia chose unpaid carework and consequently ended up poor and financially dependent she looks, *prima facie*, agent responsible for her poverty – she knowingly chose it – and yet it seems unjust to leave her to bear poverty resulting from caring for others.

The real world parallel of the view that unpaid carers author their own poverty is also easy to locate. As I will discuss further in the course of this chapter and the next, standard economic models count such unpaid carework as unproductive; if this widespread assumption is correct, why economically reward people for performing economically unproductive activities?<sup>204</sup> This classification of caring activities (traditionally gendered female) as unproductive is one reason women in the UK – who continue to shoulder a greater burden of unpaid care<sup>205</sup> – are more likely to live in poverty and have fewer financial assets.<sup>206</sup> Many women in heterosexual couples rely on their partner to save for them but neither assets nor financial decision-making are always shared equally.<sup>207</sup>

Moreover, lone parents – 90% of whom are women<sup>208</sup> – cannot rely on a partner's income while they care for children; lone-parent households are twice as likely to

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<sup>203</sup> Anderson (1999: 298) named this problem. For differing luck egalitarian responses compare Rakowski (1991: 109, 153) to Knight (2005: 60-62).

<sup>204</sup> Folbre (1991); Marcal (2015).

<sup>205</sup> Coote and Himmelweit (2013).

<sup>206</sup> Reis (2018). Westaway and McKay (2007: 5) argue that gendered savings and debt gaps are 'mostly simply a symptom' of the gender pay gap and women's shouldering of unpaid carework.

<sup>207</sup> Westaway and McKay (2007); Rowlingson and Joseph (2010).

<sup>208</sup> Cain (2016: 489).

live in poverty as two-parent households.<sup>209</sup> As the principle that all public support be made conditional on people making the ‘right choices’ has taken deeper root in the UK’s benefits regime, these single parents are caught between their children’s care needs and financial sanctions for either not working full time or for failing to spend 35 hours a week actively looking for work.<sup>210</sup> Working out how and why we attribute responsibility in cases of housing, assault, and unpaid carework therefore has both real-world and philosophical import.<sup>211</sup>

### 4.3. Three Indeterminacies of Agent Responsibility

Political philosophers who use the concepts of choice and/or agent responsibility do not tend to spend much time analysing exactly how these concepts work. As discussed, some simply acknowledge this gap in their work; others argue that such an analysis must be done by metaphysicians rather than political philosophers; and, in practice, many simply adopt a common-sense analysis of the concept whereby they accept that our intuitions on who is responsible for what are reliable enough to form the foundations of normative political debate.<sup>212</sup>

Standard understandings, then, tend to begin and end with the idea that responsibility requires causation, intention, and reasonable foreseeability: to be responsible for outcome  $x$ , this account says, my intentional action  $y$  must have

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<sup>209</sup> Department for Work and Pensions (2017).

<sup>210</sup> Cain (2016).

<sup>211</sup> Responsibility-sensitive egalitarians would not endorse the inequalities resulting from the real-world ‘choices’ just outlined because the choices were not made from an initially equal baseline. I am only highlighting how dominant philosophical models of determinate agent responsibility mirror the dominant models operating in mainstream public political discourse in certain ways: both assume certain forms of ‘irresponsible’ behaviour can make one solely responsible for one’s homelessness, or partly responsible for one’s sexual assault, for example.

<sup>212</sup> Segall (2013: 3), Stemplowska (2009: 240), and Tan (2008: 669) simply acknowledge this gap in their work; Cohen (1989: 934), Arneson (2004: 10), and Knight (2006: 185) suggest that the concept lies within metaphysics rather than political philosophy; Dworkin (2002: 289-90, 323), Segall (2013: 3), Stemplowska (2009: 240), and Knight (2009: 149), adopt a common-sense approach though only Dworkin does so explicitly. For discussion see Chapter 3, Section 2.



caused  $x$ , and  $x$  must have been a reasonably foreseeable consequence of  $y$ .<sup>213</sup> However, as shown in Chapter 3, this standard account struggles with authorship attributions the case of sexual assault – and in ways that do not look straightforwardly fixable through small tweaks to the reasonable foreseeability requirement.

In fact, when we try to ascertain responsibility using this definition we hit three sources of indeterminacy. These indeterminacies usually remain hidden because political philosophers tend to theorise about responsibility using cases where two similarly positioned people both need assistance, one despite having chosen prudently and the other due to less prudent choices.<sup>214</sup> In the case of Adam and Ben, for example, it seems clear that candle-lighting Ben, unlike electrical-fault Adam, is responsible for his homelessness, and this can prompt us to think Adam should get the remaining flat; such examples are commonly used to motivate just this kind of conclusion.<sup>215</sup> Arguing for more nuance, Stemplowska thinks instead we are only justly left to bear the burdens of what we are responsible for under specific, limited circumstances.<sup>216</sup> Neither approach question Ben's responsibility for his homelessness, however.

Notice how the framing of the case suggests that Adam and Ben are the only relevant agents here – that no other potential authors of Ben's homelessness are worth consideration. Yet this assumption seems unfounded on our current standard definition of responsibility. For one thing, the state has found itself unable to house a victim of multiple catastrophic accidents (flood and fire). Ben negligently left the

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<sup>213</sup> For expanded discussion of the issues of this paragraph, see Chapter 3, Section 2.

<sup>214</sup> E.g. Kymlicka (2002: 72-73) reasons from a case of two people with identical talent, background and resources; Knight (2015: 126-128) analyses the case of initially identical Bill and Ben; Segall (2013: 44) discusses Prudent and Lazy, stranded on a desert island to further abstract them from any social context.

<sup>215</sup> For examples, see footnote 198 (p.75).

<sup>216</sup> Stemplowska (2009: 242-243). Cf. Rakowski (1991: Ch.3).

candle burning but we might think the state's under-provisioning of emergency housing negligent too. To hold Ben solely responsible for his homelessness, we must first assume either that the state does not exist as a political agent capable of responsibility or that, if it does, it did not play any role in bringing this homelessness outcome about. If the state is capable of responsibility and might have foreseeably contributed to Ben's homelessness, his sole responsibility for this outcome remains unclear.

Other agents are also worth considering. Did Ben's flat meet fire safety standards and, if not, are the local housing authority or the building company agents capable of responsibility? Was Ben entitled to firefighting help from the state or local council that he never received, leaving him unable to control the fire on his own? Did Adam sit passively next to his garden hose watching as, through Ben's open window, the candle-flame slowly caught the curtains?

The first indeterminacy, then, stems from the fact that our definition is silent regarding what agents capable of responsibility exist in the political sphere, and which of these agents' actions and omissions are relevant to the outcome in question. We must supplement the definition before we can talk confidently about who is responsible for what. Can only individuals act intentionally, or can collectives do so too? And of those agents capable of intentional action, how are we to determine which of their intentional actions and omissions are relevant to the outcome in question? Let's call this the *problem of picking the right agents*.

The second indeterminacy arises because we sometimes deny that responsibility flows from an intentional action to certain nonetheless reasonably foreseeable consequences. At these times, it seems the outcome no longer 'belongs' to the agent who causally contributed to it, despite its apparent foreseeability. This is clearest in cases of rights infringements like sexual assault and I have already gestured towards

this indeterminacy in Chapter 3.

Recall that, contra common-sense and Stemplowska's belief, feminists insist that co-responsibility for the assault does not flow from our woman's choice to risk drinking alone in public.<sup>217</sup> Though her decision to take this risk causally contributed to the assault, so did many other intentional actions and omissions not mentioned: the bar owner's choice to open that night despite our knowledge that alcohol can facilitate sexual assaults; the local authority's licensing and policing decisions in the face of similar knowledge; the perpetrator's parents' decision to leave their son unsupervised despite our knowing that 99% of perpetrators of sexual assault are men; the perpetrator's school's failure to adequately teach the importance of consent; and so on.<sup>218</sup>

Are *all* these agents co-responsible for the assault? And if not, how do we determine why agency flows from some of these actions and omissions to the assault consequence but not others? Again, two-person, two-outcome examples hide this indeterminacy since their framing pre-selects just one or two actions for our attention and ignores all others. But this is an artificial elision rather than a solution to what I will call *the problem of mapping responsibility's flow*.

Though clearest in rights infringement cases, this indeterminacy arises much more widely. Take market transactions. Suppose the thousands of people who bought apples in a region last year each fractionally contributed to making harvesting a particular orchard look economically viable this year; comparable demand was predicted largely on the basis of last year's demand. Given this, it was easily foreseeable that these shoppers' actions would likely be a positive factor in farmers' choice to invest in growing apples this year. Do these shoppers thereby co-author

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<sup>217</sup> Stemplowska (2009: 245).

<sup>218</sup> Abbey *et al.* (2004); Flatley (2018).

some part of this year's crop? We standardly deny this; we deny that responsibility flows from their actions to this nonetheless fairly easily foreseeable outcome.

On to the third and last indeterminacy – that of ascertaining *degrees of responsibility*. Alone on an uninhabited island we might claim complete responsibility for anything we altered. But societies are fundamentally shared enterprises, meaning even seemingly independent outcomes are thoroughly enmeshed with the behaviour and choices of many other agents.<sup>219</sup> As most (all?) outcomes have more than one potential author, it is essential we know how to divide responsibility amongst multiple authors if the concept is to be of any practical use.

Take Sylvia, who is not formally employed but performs all the house- and carework that allows her partner to thrive at his paid job. Is Sylvia co-responsible for any of her partner's financial success, or is she only responsible for her clean house and relative poverty? This depends on how we map the flow of responsibility (our second problem). But if we decide she is co-responsible for her partner's economic productivity we must then ask: to what degree? Again, this indeterminacy remains hidden in standard two-person, two-outcome examples where each outcome tends to be framed as stemming solely from one agent's actions. And, again, our current definition offers no guidance on this issue.

We therefore lack a workable account of responsibility. Our definition leaves unsolved the problem of picking the right agents. It suggests responsible agency flows along all intentional causal chains until their results could no longer be foreseen, giving us no principled way to delimit responsibility's flow. And it is silent

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<sup>219</sup> Rawls (2009: 88-89) notes this with his emphasis on reciprocity. As does Ripstein (1998), who argues that ideas of responsibility, reciprocity, and equality are inescapably interdependent. I agree and am indebted to him here. We diverge on other, less fundamental matters: he does not address agent responsibility per se, he focuses on how legal frameworks animate conceptions of responsibility, and we develop the implications of our political accounts differently.

on how to determine degrees of responsibility, notwithstanding that societies are fundamentally shared enterprises in which all outcomes result from the combined actions of many agents.

#### 4.4. Theorising Common-sense Responsibility Attributions

Despite these three indeterminacies, we certainly act as if we have a determinate notion of responsibility, appealing to it often. Feminists claim that women who knowingly risk wearing miniskirts are not responsible for resultant sexual harassment; campaigners hold particular companies responsible for environmental disasters; if you cook me lunch, I will hold you responsible for it.<sup>220</sup> I do not think we should try to give up the concept entirely – it captures something too useful.<sup>221</sup> But, as argued in Chapter 3, to properly fix this ‘causation, intention, and reasonable foreseeability’ model requires more than a relatively simple and shallow politicisation of the reasonable foreseeability requirement; we need to go further than recognising that common-sense knowledge is shared unequally across society in ways that reflect political power hierarchies.

What to attempt instead, then? Rather than dive straight into my alternative solutions to the three problems just sketched, I turn to the descriptive task of accounting for how people do in fact make determinate responsibility ascriptions. Understanding this sheds light on how political philosophers should reason with and about the concept of agent responsibility. The foundations of this descriptive task consist of, first, an expanded explanation of political schemas – those unconscious frameworks introduced in Chapter 2 to discuss the ‘system of thought’ element of neoliberalism. Second, an explanation of how political schemas shed light on how we do and should decide upon which intentional agents exist within the political sphere. And, third, an analysis of how responsibility’s causal requirement functions in everyday practice. Finally, I

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<sup>220</sup> Remeikis (2018); Fanflick (2007: 17); Greenpeace (2015).

<sup>221</sup> I discuss the prospects of giving up the concept altogether in Chapter 6, Section 2.2, defending its limited use for certain theoretical tasks.

explain how these elements help us instinctively and unthinkingly resolve the three indeterminacies just outlined.

#### *4.4.1. Schemas*

When ascribing responsibility, we normally unthinkingly pick out who we take to be the relevant agents, making quick, intuitive assumptions about causal responsibility and reasonable foreseeability as we go. I will argue that we do this through reliance on common-sense political schemas.

A schema is a conceptual, narrative and evaluative framework that renders reality ‘thinkable’.<sup>222</sup> We could list uncountable facts about any situation, and uncountable causes for any outcome. For the presence of one simple tree, for example, we can look to the people and animals who contributed to its genetic make-up and nutrition, its position and surroundings, the effects of drought on its survival, who and what caused that drought, and so on, ad infinitum. Schemas are systems of thought that help us pick only some facts and causes from this otherwise overwhelming chaos, characterise them in certain ways, and conceptualise their relationships to one another. Schemas help us individuate objects and events and guide our judgements about the relative salience of causal chains so that, though the presence of carbon dioxide is essential to the tree’s survival, it is not what we would point to when asked about its continued presence.

Schemas contain the unspoken assumptions we use to make sense of our world, and different spheres of life have their own dominant schemas. Importantly, a sphere’s dominant (common-sense) schemas tend to reinforce its dominant practices, and vice

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<sup>222</sup> My definition is drawn from Rose’s (1996) concept of a ‘political rationality’ and Haslanger’s (2012d) concept of a ‘schema’. I avoid ‘rationality’ terminology because of its association with different debates in analytic philosophy (e.g. Kolodny and Brunero 2016). Schemas resemble Geuss’ notion of ideology in his non-pejorative, ‘descriptive sense’ (1981, 4-6).

versa - the conceptual and the practical grow and work together.<sup>223</sup> For example, the family sphere involves the concepts of mother and child. It contains rules and norms - a mother is a woman with an especially strong emotional bond to her child, plays a specific role in their development, and so on. These elements contribute to a schema within which mothers are assumed specially placed to care for their children, and where mothers' role as primary carers is assumed.

Because the conceptual and the practical tend to work together, dominant schemas become *naturalised* through their fit with dominant practices. For example, the view of mothers' special childcare roles becomes naturalised as plain fact through its frictionless fit with a range of dominant practices whereby mothers act as the primarily carers of young children. Because spheres' dominant practices tend to mesh with and reinforce their dominant schemas, schemas often go unnoticed. Frequently used and rarely challenged, these thought-, feeling- and action-structuring frameworks remain largely unconscious.

#### ***4.4.2. Schemas' Political Ontologies***

I now turn to the first role schemas play in authorship attributions. I outline how, in everyday practice, common-sense schemas contain the background political ontologies that partly animate our intuitive authorship ascriptions. I argue that implicit political ontologies are crucial in setting responsibility's parameters. For if we intuitively tend to view certain kinds of persons or groups as incapable of intentional agency and others as model examples of intentional agents, we will not hold the former agent responsible

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<sup>223</sup> By 'dominant' I mean a schema that has (or is gaining) widely accepted discursive force so that it feels like common sense and aligns (or increasingly aligns) with the sphere's key practices, material structures, and distributions. Here I work from Williams (1973: 9), who discusses 'dominant' hegemonic systems as 'not merely abstract but... organised and lived', and because of this, which come to constitute 'a sense of reality.' As Williams notes, such dominance will never be static or absolute, since schemas are neither neatly unified nor total in reign; see Brown (2015: 48) for a description of the neoliberal political schema as at once both a 'global phenomenon' and an 'inconsistent, morphing, differentiated, unsystematic, contradictory and impure... field of oscillations'. I use 'dissident' to refer to schemas not dominant in this sense.

for anything and will look straight to the latter when assigning authorship. More specifically, I suggest that individualist political ontologies predominate in political philosophy and public political discourse.

I then argue that egalitarians can and should critically engage with this common-sense individualism. It is a mistake to think political philosophers need simply wait for a value-free metaphysics to tell us which political ontology is the correct one. This is because there is no neat divide between social metaphysics and normative political philosophy, nor is social metaphysics necessarily more explanatorily foundational than normative political philosophy. Rather, normative political concerns can play a legitimate role in determining our political ontology, and thus in setting the parameters for our authorship attributions.

### *(i) Common-sense Political Ontologies*

*'There is no such thing as society. There are only individual men and women... and their families.'* – Margaret Thatcher<sup>224</sup>

Egalitarian political-philosophical appeals to responsibility often presume a background ontological individualism.<sup>225</sup> As discussed, two-person, two-outcome examples like that of Adam and Ben pre-pick the relevant agents in their framing and, in doing so, silently exclude possibly relevant collective political agents like the state. Similarly, Stemplowska mentions only an assault victim and the perpetrator when discussing responsibility for sexual assault; no political collectives who may have been co-responsible for enabling sexual assault are mentioned. Kymlicka reasons from a case of two people with identical talent, background and resources.<sup>226</sup> Knight analyses the

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<sup>224</sup> Thatcher (1987). See footnote 275 (p.101) on neoliberal waverings between the individual and the family as the basic unit of society.

<sup>225</sup> Mills (2005: 168) argues that this ontological individualism is a hallmark of ideal theory more generally, and that it serves to abstract away from structural domination.

<sup>226</sup> Kymlicka (2002: 72-73).



case of initially identical Bill and Ben.<sup>227</sup> Shlomi Segall goes so far as to set the agents of one of his examples ('Prudent and Lazy') on a desert island; this constrains our reasoning about responsibility to a context lacking not just other collective agents, but any other agents at all.<sup>228</sup> Two-person, two-outcome cases such as these, which predominate in this literature, instantiate a kind of political ontological individualism via the back door.<sup>229</sup>

This individualism comfortably mirrors the common-sense political ontology that forms an important part of our dominant neoliberal political schema. Recall this section's guide quote: Thatcher's famous statement of neoliberalism's individualist political ontology in which she asserts that there is no such thing as society. Using this ontology, neoliberalism presents individuals as the only relevant, accountable political agents. And, by reducing collectives to nothing but the sum of individuals' membership choices (and resultant contractual obligations), neoliberal rationality erodes the very possibility of socio-political collectives as living political bodies with collective power and agency.<sup>230</sup> 'Choice' is thus often used in Conservative discourse to promote anti-statism.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Knight (2015: 126-128).

<sup>228</sup> Segall (2013: 44) adapts this example from Vallentyne (2003), adding the desert island setting.

<sup>229</sup> Though it could be claimed that these cases instantiate methodological rather than ontological individualism, our methodological choices are informed by our underlying ontologies; if responsibility-sensitive egalitarians recognise collective political agents' capacities for intentional action, why systematically leave such agents out of their examples and discussions? Some egalitarian theorists explicitly state their individualistic grounding assumptions: e.g. Knight (2009: 5); Temkin (1993: 92). (For discussion of the similar methodological individualism common within neoclassical economics and its political effects, see Chapter 8, Section 3.2.) Lippert-Rasmussen (2011) is one important exception to this individualistic norm; he argues that the possibility of group agents complicates the role that choice and fault can play in responsibility-sensitive approaches to distributive justice since individual members of groups may behave in certain ways due to fairness considerations or attempts to cooperate.

<sup>230</sup> See Brown (2016).

<sup>231</sup> See Phillips (1998: 855).

I do not think it coincidental that the background political ontology assumed by the philosophical literature on responsibility so often mirrors the dominant political ontology of neoliberalism. After all, the express goal of responsibility-sensitive egalitarians was to incorporate into egalitarian thought ‘the most powerful idea in the arsenal of the anti-egalitarian right: the idea of choice and responsibility.’<sup>232</sup> As Thatcher’s quote suggests, this powerful idea was always based on *individual*, rather than collective, choice and responsibility. On what basis might egalitarians be able to challenge this ontological individualism?

### *(ii) Egalitarian Political Ontologies*

Until now I have mentioned only *dominant* schemas. But, of course, a sphere’s dominant schema is never uncontested or static, and they are often internally contradictory, incomplete, or both. Since the political ontology enshrined in schemas helps set the parameters of our responsibility attributions, contesting a dominant ontology generates different parameters. Contesting common-sense political ontologies can therefore create space for different authorship attributions. Now, deciding on the units that comprise political reality and their capabilities is clearly a political question in the sense that political scientists and philosophers engage these topics.<sup>233</sup> But, more than this, adjudicating between political ontologies can legitimately involve *normative* political judgements.

To see why, first note that empirical investigation alone will never conclusively determine whether political collectives are agents capable of responsibility. As Colin Hay puts it, ‘evidence alone is not ontologically discriminating, though it is often presented as such.’<sup>234</sup> The same outcome can be accounted for as either the product of a

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<sup>232</sup> Cohen (1989: 933).

<sup>233</sup> E.g. Hay (2006); Furlong and Marsh (2007); Stanley (2012).

<sup>234</sup> Hay (2006: 86). Furthermore, if ontology could be decided through empirical investigation alone, the topic would fall largely to social scientists rather than philosophers and social theorists.

collective agent or of a group of individual agents, and empirical investigation free from question-begging ontological assumptions cannot conclusively discriminate between these explanations. We therefore rely on other ways to determine whether an ontology is adequate. Furthermore, when determining the adequacy of political ontologies, ‘part of what we need to account for and explain... are ‘thick’ or normative considerations like injustice and unfairness.’<sup>235</sup> In other words, one of the factors that can legitimately influence our choice of political ontology is the normative implications of the various plausible ontological theories we are adjudicating between.

This claim borrows insights from feminist metaphysicians like Sally Haslanger who argue, first, that contemporary metaphysicians commonly adopt an account of justification that is ‘holist’ – an account that understands a belief to be justified if it ‘coheres widely with other beliefs one has.’<sup>236</sup> This forms the basis of their second claim, that ‘metaphysical inquiry should be responsive to a broad range of experience as well as theoretical pressures from other domains, *including normative inquiry*.’<sup>237</sup> Haslanger goes on to describe ‘foundationalist’ views of metaphysics – views which understand metaphysicians to have unmediated access to reality and metaphysical theories to strictly and unquestionably constrain all other modes of theorising – as ‘completely outdated.’<sup>238</sup>

Claiming that normative values can play a legitimate role in theory choice does not mean we are free to pick whichever political ontology best suits our normative project; we must still assess their internal coherence, fruitfulness, parsimony, unity, evidential support (and so on). It means only that the political and moral values that

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<sup>235</sup> I borrow this quote from Barnes’ (2017: 2420-2421) interpretation of Haslanger’s ‘ameliorative project’ in social metaphysics. Though Barnes is here talking about social categories like race and gender, I here apply this approach to social ontology more broadly.

<sup>236</sup> Haslanger (2012a: 146).

<sup>237</sup> Haslanger (2012a: 147), my emphasis.

<sup>238</sup> Haslanger (2012a: 146).

form the context of our inquiry can *also* play a legitimate role in our decision about which ontological theory looks best justified.

How exactly can these values play a legitimate role in ontological theory choice? As Mari Mikkola puts it, metaphysicians aim to produce ‘an organised body of *significant* truths’, rather than to simply stack up as many truths as possible regardless of significance.<sup>239</sup> Because of this, Mikkola argues, political and moral values can legitimately help us rank the significance of various facts and evidence, meaning that ‘value judgements... do not necessarily compete with facts and evidence.’<sup>240</sup> Instead, on this approach, normative and evidential considerations interact: certain facts become especially significant because of the normative values that contextualise our inquiry. Like Haslanger, Mikkola thus concludes that ‘social justice matters to our philosophical theorising even in fields that are *prima facie* value-neutral.’<sup>241</sup>

This view is not necessarily antithetical to the approach taken towards political ontologies by political philosophers. Granted, Cohen seems to endorse the foundationalist idea that metaphysical theories function as strict outer limits to political theorising.<sup>242</sup> But, in contrast to Cohen’s approach, John Rawls’ rejection of the political ontologies of libertarianism and utilitarianism is closely entwined with his rejection of these views’ normative implications. His rejection of utilitarianism’s political ontology, for example, is not separable from his belief that utilitarianism distributes rights and duties incorrectly.<sup>243</sup> And he backs up his claim that we should

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<sup>239</sup> Mikkola (2015: 784).

<sup>240</sup> Mikkola (2015: 803).

<sup>241</sup> Mikkola (2015: 804).

<sup>242</sup> Cohen (1989: 934) suggests this by stating that putting agent responsibility at the centre of distributive justice may well ‘subordinate’ political philosophy to ‘metaphysical questions.’ Matravers (2002: 177) likewise adopts this line.

<sup>243</sup> Rawls (2009: 24). Pettit (2005) argues that Rawls’ political ontology is closely tied to his normative political beliefs.

understand societies not as collections of atomised individuals but rather as cooperative ventures for mutual advantage by asserting the normative claim that ‘social cooperation makes possible a better life for all.’<sup>244</sup> Rawls’ approach therefore seems to accept the necessity of dialogue between political philosophy and social ontology.<sup>245</sup>

The argument that there is no neat divide between (nor straightforward hierarchy of) social metaphysics and normative political philosophy is therefore not revolutionary within either discipline. Nonetheless, I include this section’s arguments for three reasons. First, to call attention to political ontologies’ role in authorship attributions – a role I have not seen acknowledged elsewhere.<sup>246</sup> Second, to highlight the importance of accounting for the normative costs and benefits of different political ontologies; at the very least, egalitarians should recognise the normative impact of tacitly accepting the right’s individualist ontology without challenge. And, finally, to complicate any misguided attempt to neatly separate metaphysics from normative political inquiry in order to make the former foundational.

If, as argued, normative political concerns can play a legitimate role in determining our political ontology and if our political ontology sets the bounds of our responsibility attributions, we have responsibility’s first political dimension. Our dominant neoliberal individualist ontology suggests that the state and other collectives do not exist as responsible agents. This ontology is overwhelmingly left unchallenged within the responsibility-sensitive egalitarian literature, which tends to reason from examples in

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<sup>244</sup> Rawls (2009: 4).

<sup>245</sup> Or, at least, Rawls’ approach to this issue at this point in his work seems to accept this necessity.

<sup>246</sup> Though Lippert-Rasmussen (2011) explores examples involving group agents he does not discuss matters of political ontology at all. Rather, he assumes that ‘a group choice... simply is the mereological sum of the acts of all members’ (Lippert-Rasmussen 2011: 114).

which a few individuals' separate choices and resultant outcomes are isolated from wider social context and compared.

Though this dominant ontology often underlies authorship attributions, I have argued that egalitarian political philosophers can legitimately play a role in challenging it. This is because normative debates about the costs and benefits of different ontological theories are not neatly separable from, but holistically implicated in questions of social ontological theory choice. More specifically, given the centrality of individualism to right-wing and neoliberal thought, egalitarians have good reason to explore the possibility of authorship attributions informed by a less individualist political ontology (and to recognise the costs of not doing so). To start this exploration, I here assume the possibility of collective political agents.

However, even assuming that political collectives are capable of responsible agency we still need to know how to determine whether responsibility flows from these potentially relevant agents' actions and omissions to our outcomes of interest. In other words, the full resolution of the problem of picking the right agents depends on our resolving the second problem – that of mapping responsibility's flow. I therefore turn to this indeterminacy next, explaining how we intuitively resolve it in our common-sense responsibility attributions.

#### *4.4.3. Schemas' Maps of Actual Causation*

Discussing the sexual assault case in Chapter 3, I said feminists deny that our woman co-authors the assault because we deny her causal responsibility for it. We classify the idea that the victim did something to cause her rape or sexual assault as a common sexist myth in need of dismantling.<sup>247</sup> In order to fully defend these feminist claims (which I do in Chapter 5), I first need to explain how this sexist myth

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<sup>247</sup> Fanflick (2007: 17).

arises and persists. My next task, therefore, is to explain *why* the victim and perpetrator are so often the only two agents singled out for co-responsibility.

To do so requires our rooting deeper into responsibility's causal requirement. Philosophers often distinguish 'actual causation' from wider 'causal structure'.<sup>248</sup> Judgements of actual causation answer the question: which actions/event(s) were *causally responsible* for a particular outcome?<sup>249</sup> Since actual causation equates to causal responsibility, actual causation is what is required for agent responsibility.<sup>250</sup>

To see how actual causation works, return to our assault case. If the perpetrator's parents had not given birth to him, or had closely supervised his leisure time as if he were a child, the assault would not have happened. Yet it seems absurd to say that his parents are causally responsible for the assault because they gave birth to him and allowed him normal adult freedoms – it calls attention to entirely the wrong things. Asked, 'what caused this assault?' it is almost impossible to think of a situation in which 'his parents' giving birth' could ever be anything but an entirely irrelevant and unhelpful response.

To capture the wrongness of this answer, philosophers say that though his parents' actions are part of the 'causal structure' leading to this event, they are nonetheless not amongst its 'actual causes.' Put differently, though his parents' actions are important parts of the assault's background enabling conditions, they are not causally responsible for it. This means they cannot be held agent responsible for it either.

Since responsibility requires actual causation rather than merely being part of the

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<sup>248</sup> E.g. Hitchcock & Knobe (2009); Statham (2018).

<sup>249</sup> Statham (2018).

<sup>250</sup> In this, my account of agent responsibility's causal condition differs from Vallentyne (2008) who understands every choice reasonably foreseeably part of the *causal structure* of an outcome as engendering agent responsibility; no distinction is recognised between choices that count only as enabling background conditions and choices that count as 'actual causes.'

causal structure leading to the outcome, we need to know what distinguishes actual causes from causal background conditions. A growing body of philosophical and empirical work suggests that judgements of actual causation are guided by *statistical norms* (regarding frequency: how often action  $x$  precedes outcome  $y$ ) and *prescriptive norms* (regarding what ought to happen: whether outcome  $y$  ought to follow from action  $x$ , and whether action  $x$  ought to be performed).<sup>251</sup>

For example, the rain only counts as an actual cause of the flood if it violates the statistical rainfall norm of the region in question; if we had exactly average rainfall we would look elsewhere for the flood's actual causes. In normal, peace-time contexts, your firing a gun at someone on the street will count as an actual cause of their death whereas their leaving the house that day will not because strong prescriptive norms prohibit the former but not the latter: getting shot ought not to follow from leaving the house, and one ought not shoot people.<sup>252</sup> The role of prescriptive and statistical norms in guiding judgements of actual causation reveals that actual causation is not the paradigmatically non-normative notion it first appears.

Call the networks of dominant statistical and prescriptive norms relating to social interaction our common-sense 'map of actual social causation.' This map constitutes the framework guiding common-sense judgements about what kinds of actions are causally responsible for what kinds of outcomes. Like political ontologies, such maps are an important part of political schemas.<sup>253</sup> I now outline how our dominant map of actual social causation shapes our common-sense responsibility attributions. I argue

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<sup>251</sup> E.g. McGrath (2005). Statham (2018: Sections 1-2) summarises this body of philosophical work. Similar claims are made by several theorists of social science: e.g. Hammersley (2014); Marini and Singer (1988: 354). See also Hitchcock and Knobe (2009).

<sup>252</sup> Context is crucial, as this example suggests; I discuss this in Chapter 5, Section 2.

<sup>253</sup> Maps of actual social causation's reliance on norms tallies with my broader argument in Chapter 2, Section 3. There, I claimed that schemas become entrenched primarily through creative power, which works to govern behaviour through social norms, engendering unthinking acceptance through repetition and the intricate webs of reward and sanction that such norms often carry.



that norms regarding community expectations and political obligations animate authorship judgements in the homelessness and assault cases. I then explain how norms regarding the public-private divide animate common-sense authorship judgements in the unpaid carework case.

##### (i) *Homelessness*

*[T]oo many children and people have been given to understand... 'I am homeless, the Government must house me!' and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! – Margaret Thatcher<sup>254</sup>*

Who is causally responsible for Ben's homelessness? Recall that in Section 4.3 we were unable to give a principled account of which agents' actions and omissions were relevant to this outcome. Did the state's under-provisioning of emergency housing make them causally co-responsible by omission, for example? To answer questions like this, and therefore to resolve the problem of picking the right agents, we must know what makes an action causally responsible by omission for a certain outcome.

Happily, we now have the resources to explain how this indeterminacy is resolved in everyday practice. As outlined, causal responsibility equates to actual causation, and causal responsibility by omission is no exception. Unsurprisingly then, what counts as causation by omission depends on dominant prescriptive and statistical norms. This tallies with philosophical literature on omissions; Patricia Smith, for example, states that what counts as an omission depends 'crucially and exclusively on a context of expectations, and very largely on a network of community expectations... about what ought to be done or what will be done.'<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Thatcher (1987).

<sup>255</sup> Smith (1990: 171).

For example, I am causally responsible by omission for your plants dying because, in promising to water them and failing to do so, I violated the normal expectation that one ought to, and will, keep one's promises.<sup>256</sup> Causal responsibility by omission thus depends on what we expect of agents and, especially, on norms regarding what *responsibilities as obligations* individual and collective agents hold to one another. For the case in hand – political appeals to agent responsibility – norms of political obligation therefore become essential determinants.

To see how, return to Ben. Whether the state is commonly held co-responsible for Ben's homelessness depends on whether there is a strong, pervasive statistical or prescriptive norm that the state has a 'responsibility as obligation' to help rehouse homeless people. Suppose both such norms exist: our state is under a legal obligation to help rehouse homeless citizens that they normally fulfil, and our political community tends to think this is how the state ought to behave. In such a context, I contend, an instance of state failure to provide this help will commonly be counted as an actual cause of Ben's homelessness, rather than as part of its background causal structure.<sup>257</sup>

In this way, statistical and prescriptive norms dictating the political obligations agents hold towards one another determine who we tend to think caused outcomes by omission. And these judgements shape how agent responsibility is understood to flow along some reasonably foreseeable intentional causal chains but not others. If the state is commonly understood to hold no obligation to help house homeless people, it will

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<sup>256</sup> What if the relevant prescriptive norm comes apart from the relevant statistical norm? Suppose I, or people like me, barely ever keep my promises – I am entirely untrustworthy and have failed repeatedly to water your plants in the past. Which norm then governs actual social causation – prescriptive or statistical? I suggest (in Chapter 5, Section 2) that this depends on conversational context and, especially, on the purposes for which we draw on the notion of actual causation.

<sup>257</sup> Likewise, his local authority will commonly be held causally co-responsible if they violated a norm that holds them obligated to provide adequate fire-fighting assistance. So too will Adam be held causally responsible by omission if he sat next to his garden hose merely watching as the fire caught, if we normally think him obligated to take action in such circumstances.

not normally be held responsible for Ben's lack of a house, despite the fact that its decision to not provide more emergency housing foreseeably formed part of the causal structure leading to Ben's homelessness. As statistical and prescriptive norms of unconditional state housing assistance are gradually eroded, we therefore become increasingly quick to accept Ben as the sole author of his homelessness.

It is important to re-emphasise that I am not claiming these common-sense resolutions of the indeterminacies of picking the right agents and mapping responsibility's flow are the *right* ones. I claim only that this is how we unthinkingly resolve these indeterminacies when we make instinctive judgements of authorship. (In Chapter 5 I use the account advanced here to show how egalitarians can best challenge these common-sense resolutions.) For now, however, notice how our attempt to pin down how we in fact make determinate agent responsibility attributions has led us to the significance of responsibilities as obligations; try as we might to separate out the different kinds of responsibility, they soon spring back into a co-dependent tangle.

##### **(ii) *Sexual assault***

We can now see why people so often single out the perpetrator and the victim as the relevant potential co-authors in the assault case. By perpetrating sexual assault, the perpetrator violates strong dominant norms that one ought not to and will not assault people. And, more interestingly, we commonly single out the victim as a potential co-author because our dominant map of actual causation is sexist: it enshrines the expectation that women protect themselves from sexual violence by curtailing their basic freedoms if necessary. The potential – realised here – for inequalitarian norms and expectations to animate maps of actual causation will prove of central importance.

Rape prevention techniques focusing on disciplining women's behaviour (rather than stopping potential perpetrators from committing sexual assault) are a

particularly traditional form of responsabilisation. For example, rape statistics are often used to threaten women into a 'healthy caution', encouraging women to fear sexual violence as a form of 'responsible citizenship.'<sup>258</sup> As this language suggest, the norm that women protect themselves often weaves back and forth over the line between statistical diagnoses – drinking alone as a woman *often* results in sexual assault – and prescriptive warnings – women *ought* not drink alone.<sup>259</sup> This intertwining of the descriptive and the prescriptive is key to the naturalisation of the prescriptive norm as neutral/natural common sense rather than contestable, normative political judgement.<sup>260</sup>

As Rachel Hall argues, these narrative techniques 'privatize the woman's body in order to refuse the responsibility for safeguarding her freedom to live, move, and socialize unharmed.'<sup>261</sup> In other words, our dominant political schema works to *privatise* the risk of sexual assault by holding individual women obligated to avoid it for themselves. With these implicit norms framing common-sense understandings of and discussions about sexual assault, women's drinking (/mode of dress/choice of transport home/friendliness with her assaulter) is understood to constitute an actual cause of assaults. Within this dominant map of actual causation, our assault victim's drinking alone makes her causally co-responsible for the assault and thus agent co-responsible for it too, since the risks she took are common knowledge.

Though this particular form of risk privatisation has a long pedigree, the

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<sup>258</sup> Hall (2004: 8 & 11). A study by Jago and Christenfeld (2018: 4) confirms that 'increased victim blaming does occur as a result of victim-focused risk avoidance seminars.'

<sup>259</sup> For example, Yoffe (2013), discussing alcohol and sexual assault, states that 'the truth' is that women 'are responsible for keeping their wits about them', and that young women 'have to understand safety begins with you.' These sound like prescriptive statements to me. She also asserts, apropos of no evidence whatsoever, that 'nothing is going to be as effective at preventing alcohol-facilitated assaults as a reduction in alcohol consumption' – this sounds more like a statistical claim.

<sup>260</sup> As Grossberg (1996: 159) notes, 'what is natural can be taken for granted; it defines 'common sense.'

<sup>261</sup> Hall (2004: 7).

phenomenon is wider reaching. Similar risk privatisation is also fostered by allocating responsibility for Ben's homelessness to him alone, for example. And, in fact, this kind of risk privatisation is central to the neoliberal politics of 'responsibilisation' described in Chapter 2. It functions to reallocate both critical attention and liabilities from the state and other collectives to individuals in healthcare, housing, education, and elsewhere.<sup>262</sup> The neoliberal economist Gary Becker's reasoning is archetypical of this political move; in holding that most ('if not all!') deaths are 'to some extent' self-authored because we all sometimes make choices we know are not maximally healthy, he takes this responsibilisation to its extreme.<sup>263</sup>

Foregrounding individuals' actions and enlarging their personal obligations goes in hand with occluding possibly relevant collective agents and the effects of their actions. Becker's foregrounding of individuals' personal choices occludes other agents whose actions impact people's health, for example. Similarly, sexist rape prevention discourse occludes other agents' role in reproducing a climate in which sexual assault is to be expected, by addressing women as 'a series of individual bodies responsible for protecting their own "stuff".'<sup>264</sup> This is because, in effect, picking one or two actions to hold up for attention as the actual causes of an event also serves to deflect attention from other potential causes.<sup>265</sup>

In this way, ontological individualism reinforces and is reinforced by this inegalitarian push to allocate responsibility for an increasing range of misfortunes to individuals alone. As Wendy Brown puts it, 'disintegrating the social into entrepreneurial and self-investing bits' – i.e. adopting an individualistic political

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<sup>262</sup> Rose (1996); Brown (2015).

<sup>263</sup> Becker (2013: 10).

<sup>264</sup> Hall (2004: 7).

<sup>265</sup> Swanson (2010: 227) makes this point when discussing the context-sensitivity of causal talk. Young (2011b: 180) makes a similar argument about the 'liability model' of responsibility.

ontology and a map of actual social causation that holds individuals obligated to secure their own wellbeing and prosperity through perfect personal choices – ‘removes umbrellas of protection provided by belonging, whether to a pension plan or to a citizenry.’<sup>266</sup>

No coincidence, then, that David Cameron repeatedly used the language of responsibility to justify his programme of austerity.<sup>267</sup> Nor that the UK Health Minister insists first and foremost on the need for personal responsibility and good choices in healthcare while simultaneously presiding over a ‘severely and chronically underfunded’ public healthcare system.<sup>268</sup> Ontological individualism combined with a responsabilising map of actual social causation provides perfect cover for the dismantling of public protections and social goods.

### **(iii) Carework**

*Where women are concerned, their labour appears to be a personal service outside of capital. - Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James*<sup>269</sup>

Cases of homelessness and sexual assault illustrate the role dominant maps of actual social causation play in guiding common-sense authorship ascriptions. Such maps have always enshrined sexist responsabilising obligations. And, in the last few decades, they have increasingly enshrined neoliberal responsabilising assumptions about who holds what political obligations. The case of unpaid carework is slightly different, however. Here, common-sense authorship attributions hinge less on

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<sup>266</sup> Brown (2015: 37).

<sup>267</sup> E.g. this chapter’s first guide quote (p.72).

<sup>268</sup> Donnelly *et al.* (2018).

<sup>269</sup> Costa & James (2017: 28)

enlarging individualist political obligations within the public realm and more on norms dividing this social/public realm from the personal/private realm.<sup>270</sup>

To see this first note that a significant part of Sylvia's partner's success at work is a foreseeable consequence of her carework at home. It frees considerable time for him to undertake paid work and ensures he is fed, rested, and refreshed on returning to the office. Yet dominant maps of actual social causation do not hold Sylvia causally responsible for her partner's success at work. Mainstream political economists, for example, implicitly define work within the private realm as unproductive, reinforcing a 'distinction between the moral (or private) and the economic (or public) world, neatly assigning women and the family to one, men and the market to the other.'<sup>271</sup> In other words, some of the most influential experts determining these maps tell us Sylvia is causally responsible for nothing of public, economic value.

The concept of the unproductive housewife solidified in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, partly in response to male trade unionist arguments that 'housewives *were – or should be – “dependents”*.'<sup>272</sup> (Notice, again, the weaving between statistical and prescriptive assertions, helping to naturalise the idea of an unproductive private sphere.) Alongside the assumption that feminized caring labour has no productive impact in the sphere of public economic value normally comes the denial of any statistical norm connecting unpaid carework to a functioning labour force, economy, and society (and the accompanying denial that such activities ought to be recognised as work).<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Though insofar as women are assumed obligated to do house- and carework for free, assumptions about obligations are not absent but rather part-constitute public-private imaginaries.

<sup>271</sup> Folbre (1991: 467).

<sup>272</sup> Folbre (1991: 464) – my emphasis.

<sup>273</sup> E.g. 'home care workers' in the US employed by private companies are legally paid below minimum wage because they do not officially count as 'employees' – (Boris and Klein 2012). Home care workers employed by private companies in the UK likewise still struggle to access a minimum wage (Merrill 2016; Plimmer 2018). (I discuss this case further in Chapters 7 and 8.) In contrast, women are often seen as the *sole authors* of family life and wellbeing within the private

Long-dominant norms delineating public from private therefore dictate that the productive effects of Sylvia's carework do not permeate into the public realm's networks of economic production. At best, her work is understood as an enabling background condition (not an actual cause) of her partner's success. Accordingly, we tend to instinctively individuate and value Sylvia's and her partner's labour according to dominant – and sexist – marketized common sense and social practices, deeming her the author of only those outcomes which markets, employment law, and gendered social norms attribute to her: her clean home, well-fed partner, and relative poverty.

Those responsibility-sensitive egalitarians who assume Sylvia authors only her carework and her poverty endorse these dominant maps of actual social causation by classifying carework as a private leisure choice. Rakowski, for example, thinks such caretakers should be left to bear their poverty.<sup>274</sup> He describes unpaid carework a 'creed' or a 'lifestyle', and treats childcare as a private leisure choice since parents are 'apt to be by far the major beneficiaries.'<sup>275</sup>

Even those responsibility-sensitive egalitarians who think unpaid carers ought not be left to bear their poverty tend to accept that these carers are agent responsible for it. Stemplowska, for example, writes that we 'assume they [poor carers] really are

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realm. As Strathern (1988: 315) puts it, 'Of course 'we' are all sophisticated enough to know that genetics requires coupling and that people do not in that sense procreate alone. But the Western imagination plays with the idea that mothers make babies in the same way as a worker makes a product, and that work is their value. In spite of the input of enabling technology, so to speak, the worker joins her labour with natural objects in order to create a thing.' The gendered public-private divide generates an invisible boundary keeping private/feminine and public/masculine actual causation separate.

<sup>274</sup> Rakowski (1991: 109).

<sup>275</sup> Rakowski (1991: 109, 153). He does not discuss inequalities between parents due to his uncharacteristic retreat to a collective agent ('parents') when allocating responsibility for children. On parallel neoliberal waverings between the individual and family as the basic unit of society, see Brown (2015: 100-107).



responsible for the choices they made.’<sup>276</sup> Similarly, Carl Knight suggests we treat ‘the choice to perform these socially valuable activities as one type of individual choice that we are prepared to subsidize.’<sup>277</sup> His recognition of care work’s social value is at odds with his assumption that paying carers counts as ‘subsidising’ an ‘individual choice.’ As with the cases of assault and homelessness, then, political philosophers’ instinctive attributions of agent responsibility track wider trends of dominant common sense.

Dominant maps of actual social causation help resolve our third indeterminacy too: that of ascertaining degrees of responsibility. After all, completely blocking responsibility’s flow from an intentional action to a foreseeable consequence is the limit case of dividing responsibility between authors; to insist Sylvia holds *no* responsibility for her partner’s economic productivity is just to insist on a certain division of responsibility.

Given this, Sylvia’s limit case can shed light on how we instinctively make gradated divisions of responsibility too. I mentioned 19<sup>th</sup> century arguments about how housewives were/should be dependents, but such divisions of economic authorship are not simply vestiges of the past. Similar divisions are expressed by approaches like the ‘marginal productivity theory of distribution’ – a ‘fundamental truth’ of neoclassical economics.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Stemplowska (2009: 242) – she uses this as further reason to think we are only justly left to bear the burdens of what we are responsible for under specific, limited circumstances.

<sup>277</sup> Knight (2005: 60-62). It is unclear whether Knight thinks the carers agent responsible for the social value created; seeing caring activities as socially valuable suggests so but talk of ‘subsidising’ this ‘individual choice’ suggests not. If he does, I would welcome this. (Though I would not endorse his approach to assessing such responsibility as outlined in a later article {Knight 2006}, which advocates leaving these assessments to a committee of metaphysicians. Why think metaphysicians alone are best equipped to determine carework’s productive impact? I would prefer some feminist political philosophers and economists were present.)

<sup>278</sup> Pullen (2009: 1).

Roughly, this theory states that a worker's pay tends to be equal to the value of their 'marginal productivity' – the productivity increase resulting from employing that worker. In other words, this theory states that wages tend to be of equal value to what workers are agent responsible for producing. It thus suggests that markets adequately divide and value workers' authorship of joint products. Since no productivity gain would result from employing Sylvia – she already does these actions for free – the marginal productivity theory of distribution suggests she does not produce anything economically valuable.

In a now-familiar naturalisation move, this theory is sometimes presented as a value-neutral scientific theorem and sometimes as a prescriptive norm. For example, the neoclassical economist J. B. Clark argued that distributions in line with the theory are *both* economically and morally correct since they express natural justice.<sup>279</sup> Though many of its modern presentations are painted as scientific theorems, the economist John Pullen argues that they still often contain 'vestiges of the language of normative judgements.'<sup>280</sup>

Within political philosophy too, market wages are often the assumed mechanism for ascertaining to what degree workers' actions matter for generating outcomes. For example, Will Kymlicka assumes that distributions resulting from market transactions perfectly reflect degrees of agent responsibility. Comparing someone who earns no income because they spend the day playing tennis with someone who earns income through selling food that they farm, he attributes the income they respectively generate solely to their different choices.<sup>281</sup> Even Stemplowska, who develops one of the most convincing and nuanced approaches of all responsibility-

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<sup>279</sup> As cited in Pullen (2009: 2).

<sup>280</sup> Pullen (2009: 5 - and see 148-149).

<sup>281</sup> Kymlicka (2002: 72-74). Dick (1975) explicitly argues that the marginal productivity theory of distribution is 'roughly' the right measure of agent responsibility.

sensitive egalitarians, implies that we can trust markets to reflect degrees of authorship in the majority of cases.<sup>282</sup>

In their resolutions of this third indeterminacy too, then, political-philosophical appeals to agent responsibility harmonize with, rather than interrogate or critique, wider trends within dominant political common sense.

### **4.5. Conclusion: Laying the Foundations for Critique**

We can now see how agent responsibility's three indeterminacies are resolved in everyday practice. I have outlined the rationales underlying our instinctive decisions about who constitute the relevant agents, how responsibility flows from their intentional actions to some foreseeable consequences but not others, and how we divide responsibility between agents. We rely on a largely unconscious political schema containing a political ontology and a map of actual social causation.<sup>283</sup> The former sets the parameters of authorship attributions by suggesting which responsible agents exist in the political sphere, while the latter provides a framework guiding our judgements about to what degree (if any) their responsible agency flows from their intentional actions to those actions' various foreseeable consequences.

These maps play this role because agent responsibility requires 'actual causation' rather than an action simply being part of an outcome's wider causal structure. Because of this, common-sense understandings of responsibility's flow rely on the narratives and models of 'actual social causation' enshrined within dominant

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<sup>282</sup> Stemplowska (2009: 249). This statement suggests markets implement fair distributions in the majority of all socio-political outcomes, the list of which includes things like: distributions of clean air, voting, political office, policing, passports, school places, and healthcare; the organisation of road traffic, inter-company holiday-day allocations, law-making, and the socio-political aspects of familial love and care. Gibson-Graham (2009: 19) caution against the 'discursive marginalisation' of the many non-market goods, services, and practices that remain fundamental even within advanced capitalist societies.

<sup>283</sup> Schemas contain much else too but these elements are most relevant to my current investigation.

political schemas. These maps – the taken-for-granted models and narratives guiding our determinations of how causal responsibility flows from some intentional actions to their consequences but not others – operate according to dominant statistical and prescriptive norms: norms about what outcomes do or should follow from what actions. In particular, they rely on norms regarding what obligations agents hold towards one another in the political realm, as well as norms regarding where the public-political realm begins and ends.

Political philosophers' instinctive or assumed resolutions to the problems of picking the right agents, delimiting responsibility's flow, and dividing responsibility often track wider trends of dominant common sense. But, as argued, these dominant beliefs can be unreflectively individualistic and sexist. They are also neoliberal: they assign responsibility for an increasing range of outcomes to individuals rather than political collectives, and they display a comfortable faith in marketized measures of economic productivity.

Having outlined how we do in fact make intuitive determinate authorship attributions, I now turn to the implications of this account. Recall that in Chapter 3, discussing the sexual assault case, I said feminists *rightly* deny that our woman co-authors the assault because they deny her causal responsibility for it. There, I suggested that common-sense views about what counts as a cause and what counts as merely a background causal enabling condition can be and are affected by political power hierarchies. Though I have not made good on this claim yet, this chapter provides the essential theoretical grounding needed for explaining and defending it in Chapter 5. There, I ask: on what basis can egalitarians best challenge common-sense maps of actual social causation so as to arrive at different responsibility attributions? And I argue that better, more egalitarian analyses of responsibility in our three cases (and beyond) are both possible and essential.

## 5. EGALITARIAN RESPONSIBILITY ATTRIBUTIONS: CRITIQUING EVERYDAY PRACTICE

*Slowly but surely, neoliberal ideas have permeated and are transforming what passes as common sense. More egalitarian and collectivist attitudes of the kind that once underpinned the welfare-state era are giving way to a more competitive, individualistic, market-driven, entrepreneurial, profit-oriented outlook.*

*But popular common sense also contains critical or utopian elements... Common sense and 'good sense' co-exist, and this provides a basis on which the left could develop a popular strategy for radical change. – Stuart Hall & Alan O'Shea <sup>284</sup>*

### 5.1. Introduction

We now have a far better idea of how we quickly and intuitively make agent responsibility ascriptions in everyday practice, despite the indeterminacies left by standard attempts to formally map the concept. We know, for example, that victims of sexual assault are often attributed some agent responsibility for their assault because of the dominance of norms which hold women responsible for protecting themselves against such violence even at the cost of their basic freedoms.

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<sup>284</sup> Hall & O'Shea (2013b).

Throughout Chapters 3 and 4 I emphasised that common practical resolutions of these indeterminacies can and should be challenged by egalitarians. As feminists rightly challenged the idea that victims co-author their assaults, I suggested, so egalitarians can and must challenge a whole host of other common-sense agent responsibility attributions. But I have yet to explain how such a challenge is possible or how political philosophers can play a role in it. I now take up this task, illustrating how egalitarian critiques of responsibility attributions are possible. I argue that egalitarians need not and must not rely on common-sense norms to animate our maps of ‘actual social causation’ – those taken-for-granted models and narratives which guide our determinations of what counts as an ‘actual cause’ of an event and what as a background causal enabling condition. Since these maps, in turn, animate our agent responsibility attributions, different maps result in different attributions.

These alternative attributions are possible because of how the conceptual tool of actual causation functions: it works to give us the best – most incisive and helpful – picture of what matters for normal purposes. Since what constitute ‘normal purposes’ vary widely according to context, actual causation too is thoroughly context-dependent. What counts as an actual cause for normal scientific purposes may be a background enabling condition for the purposes of day-to-day life, for example. In the context of normative political debates, I argue, what matters are not the relevant statistical norms but rather the right prescriptive norms for the given problem. This means that in this context, authorship attributions have important and inescapable normative political dimensions.

In this chapter I continue to work from the three cases analysed in Chapter 4: sexual assault, homelessness, and unpaid carework.<sup>285</sup> For each case, I contrast the common-sense responsibility attributions outlined in Chapter 4 with more egalitarian ‘good-

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<sup>285</sup> For a full outline of these cases see Chapter 4, Section 2.

sense' ones. Because of this, I suggest that taking agent responsibility ascriptions as our supposedly apolitical starting point and then assessing how they matter for justice obscures significant ethico-political decisions – decisions about how we should live together, what we collectively and individually owe to one another, and how we should understand and value various social activities, for example.

Political philosophers who want to use the concepts of choice and agent responsibility must therefore engage in debates concerning who is agent responsible for what, rather than leaving these determinations to common-sense or to metaphysicians. Egalitarians especially, since otherwise agent responsibility can act as a 'trojan horse': reliance on insufficiently critical conceptions of agent responsibility can smuggle inequalitarian political judgements into supposedly egalitarian theories.

As before, when I talk of responsibility without specifying which kind, I mean agent responsibility. Since I work from a definition of agent responsibility which understands me to be responsible for those outcomes I 'author', I continue to use authorship and responsibility synonymously.<sup>286</sup> Since us political philosophers are in the business of improving our collective normative political judgements, in what follows I assume it is possible to make right or wrong – or, if you prefer, better and worse – such judgements.

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<sup>286</sup> Knight and Stemplowska (2011b: 12-13).

## 5.2. Common-sense as Performative Depoliticisation

*I was never really into politics... I don't feel myself a politician even now. –*

*Tony Blair (then UK Prime Minister)<sup>287</sup>*

*In an opportunity society, as opposed to the old welfare state, government does not dictate; it empowers. It makes the individual - patient, parent, law-abiding citizen, job-seeker - the driver of the system, not the state... Choice is not a*

*Tory word. – Tony Blair<sup>288</sup>*

Common sense *presents* itself as apolitical – a ‘product of Nature rather than of history.’<sup>289</sup> But this appearance is deceptive. As argued, the common-sense judgements of social causation that our intuitive responsibility attributions rest on are often socially conservative and/or neoliberal.<sup>290</sup> For example, recall that Sylvia is not formally employed but cooks for her partner, cleans their house, washes his clothes, administers household bills and repairs, provides emotional care when he gets home, and disproportionately maintains their social and familial networks. Common sense dictates that since unpaid carework is socially and economically unproductive – a personal, private lifestyle choice – people like Sylvia who intentionally undertake unpaid carework are agent responsible for all and only the outcomes of their clean houses, happy partners, and personal impoverishment.

Assertations of common sense in this setting are performative: endorsing norms as ‘common sense’ in normative political debates legitimises and reinforces them. Worse, asserting a norm as *apolitical* common sense naturalises it, setting it outside the bounds of political contestation. For example, asserting as an apolitical premise the idea that

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<sup>287</sup> Blair in 2000, as quoted in Mair (2013: 4).

<sup>288</sup> Blair's (2004b) speech to Labour Conference.

<sup>289</sup> Hall and O'Shea (2013a: 9).

<sup>290</sup> See Chapter 4.



unpaid carers author nothing but their immediate, private caring activities and their poverty tacitly suggests it is a simple apolitical fact that such carework is not an activity of any public social or economic value.

Such depoliticisation occurs in political philosophy as well as public discourse: when discussed at all, the job of analysing agent responsibility is often cast as a metaphysical, and therefore not political-philosophical, problem.<sup>291</sup> In this way, apolitical understandings of responsibility can legitimise and naturalise conservative, neoliberal narratives and evaluations – narratives and evaluations that I will argue are anything but apolitical or incontestable. Because of this, '[t]he battle over common sense is a central part of our political life.'<sup>292</sup> It is therefore vital we critically appraise apparently apolitical common-sense responsibility attributions, replacing them with egalitarian good sense attributions wherever appropriate. Let's see how such critiques might work.

### 5.3. Egalitarian Responsibility Attributions

Recall the case of a woman who went to a bar alone to have a drink despite knowing that doing so was risky. On leaving, she is followed and sexually assaulted. In Chapter 3 I asserted that feminists were right to deny this woman co-authorship of the assault. We deny her authorship because we deny her causal responsibility (e.g. 'No matter what someone has done or failed to do, they did not cause their sexual assault'<sup>293</sup>). Feminists classify the idea that the victim did something to cause her

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<sup>291</sup> E.g. Cohen (1989: 934) and Arneson (2004: 10) suggest that the concept falls outside the remit of political philosophy. Others suggest the problem of understanding what we are agent responsible for is reducible to the metaphysical problem of free will (e.g. Knight 2006: 185; Smilansky 1997: 157-158). If political philosophers do not take this route, they often simply flag the difficulty of analysing agent responsibility before bracketing the issue (e.g. Segall 2013: 3; Stemplowska 2009: 240; Tan 2008: 669) – such a move implicitly assumes the political import of agent responsibility can be safely separated from analysis of the concept's workings. I discuss these positions at greater length in Chapter 3, Section 2.

<sup>292</sup> Hall and O'Shea (2013a: 1).

<sup>293</sup> Eastern Michigan University (2018).

rape or sexual assault as a common sexist myth in need of dismantling.<sup>294</sup>

On what grounds can feminists claim that our woman's decision to risk drinking alone in public is a background enabling condition but not an actual cause of the assault? Recall from Chapter 4 that common-sense maps of actual social causation rely on a dominant but implicit set of statistical and prescriptive norms to differentiate actual causes from background enabling conditions. But we need not – *must not* – uncritically accept these norms as the right ones on which to base judgements of actual social causation. This is because, as philosophers of causation point out, our concept of actual causation works as it does to enable us to give the most incisive picture of which acts and omissions in the broader causal structure *matter* for normal purposes.<sup>295</sup>

Note that what constitute 'normal purposes' is thoroughly context-dependent: the normal purposes of scientific investigation differ from those of normative political enquiry or interpersonal relationships, for example. The context in which we ask, 'what is causally responsible for  $x$ ?' therefore affects which answers are appropriate. For normal day-to-day life (and friendship) purposes, my breaking a promise to water your plants is causally responsible for their death. But suppose you are an amateur plant scientist busy hybridising drought-resistant spider-plants; you think your latest batch will easily last a fortnight without water but want to test this while home, so you nonetheless ask me to water them while you are away. When you ask what is causally responsible for their death with your scientist hat on, you learn nothing helpful if pointed towards unreliable waterers; you want to know about soil composition,

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<sup>294</sup> Fanflick (2007: 17).

<sup>295</sup> I adapt this from Swanson (2010: 231) who explains the context sensitivity of causal statements in terms of our selecting what 'matters most for normal purposes'. Hitchcock and Knobe (2009) make the stronger, more explicitly forward-looking claim that actual causation works like this to enable us to design effective interventions.

sunlight hours, hybridisation processes, and their relationships to plant cell breakdown.

This pragmatic, contextual component of causal responsibility helps explain why practices of attributing agent responsibility are themselves so context-dependent. For example, when judging who authored an artwork within creative contexts, the artist's original creative input strikes us as what matters, even above the creative inputs of her teachers and muses. Within this context, the artist's intentional causal chains are what matter. Yet within an economic context, we would likely characterise the editor, publisher and printer as responsible for the artwork too, since their actions also produced it in economically valuable ways.<sup>296</sup>

Now, we are investigating normative political-philosophical and normative public-political appeals to agent responsibility; for these purposes, what matters are normative (/prescriptive/evaluative) issues. Maps of actual causation animating political appeals to agent responsibility therefore have a normative dimension because they depend on our selecting what we think matters for ethico-political analyses and proposals – and in this context what matters is primarily a normative judgement.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Far smaller contextual changes can have big effects on standard practices of attributing authorship too. In academic philosophy departments, students tend to claim sole authorship for published papers even when these are written under close supervision and guidance from other staff members; within science labs, it is much more usual for such supervisors to be understood and listed as co-authors.

<sup>297</sup> This selecting amongst causal chains for the ones that matter to normative political enquiry is similar to the role that I argued normative concerns can legitimately play in ontological theory choice (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.ii): normative concerns need not compete with causal evidence but rather help us rank its significance. In this way, certain causal facts and evidence become especially significant because of the normative values contextualising our enquiry.

This all suggests that, for our purposes, maps of actual social causation should be based on the relevant *prescriptive* norm rather than the relevant statistical norm.<sup>298</sup> As a consequence, ethico-political judgements are necessarily intertwined with our judgements of actual social causation when we are drawing on actual social causation in contexts of ethico-political debate and discussion.<sup>299</sup> Furthermore, political philosophers are well-placed to critically assess common-sense evaluations of what matters for normative political enquiry.

To make this rather dry theory more digestible, I now return to our three cases. Using them, I defend this approach to responsibility attributions. I show how animating maps of actual social causation using egalitarian prescriptive norms results in different attributions of causal responsibility and therefore different, more egalitarian, attributions of agent responsibility. In each example, I argue that we can and must replace the common-sense maps of actual social causation outlined above with more egalitarian, good sense maps. As we have already begun to discuss it, I start with the case of sexual assault.

### **5.3.1. Sexual Assault**

*I ask just the men: What steps do you guys take, on a daily basis, to prevent yourselves from being sexually assaulted? At first there is a kind of awkward silence as the men try to figure out if they've been asked a trick question. The silence gives way to a smattering of nervous laughter... before someone finally raises his hand and soberly states, 'Nothing. I don't think about it.'*

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<sup>298</sup> Of course, certain statistical norms will bear on our investigations about what constitutes the right prescriptive norm. McTernan (2019) explores how facts about how the world is might bear on normative political arguments about how it ought to be.

<sup>299</sup> For arguments that normative factors legitimately influence causal judgements *tout court* see McGrath (2005), Hitchcock and Knobe (2009), and Statham (2018).

*Then I ask women the same question... As the men sit in stunned silence, the women recount safety precautions they take as part of their daily routine... Hold my keys as a potential weapon. Look in the back seat of the car before getting in. Carry a cell phone. Don't go jogging at night. Lock all the windows when I sleep, even on hot summer nights. Be careful not to drink too much. Don't put my drink down and come back to it; make sure I see it being poured. Own a big dog. Carry Mace or pepper spray. Have an unlisted phone number. Have a man's voice on my answering machine. Park in well-lit areas... Vary my route home from work. Watch what I wear. Don't use highway rest areas. Use a home alarm system. Don't wear headphones when jogging. Avoid forests or wooded areas, even in the daytime. Don't take a first-floor apartment. Go out in groups... Don't make eye contact with men on the street. Make assertive eye contact with men on the street. – Jackson Katz<sup>300</sup>*

In this case, both statistical norms and common-sense prescriptive norms point to our assault victim's drinking alone while female as *an action that matters* in normative debates about how to understand and handle such assaults. The statistical norm points this way because the activity of drinking in general – and therefore, more specifically, drinking while female – correlates with assault outcomes.<sup>301</sup> And a common prescriptive norm points towards our woman's action by suggesting that because of this danger, women *ought* to be more careful.<sup>302</sup> Our assault victim is so often deemed

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<sup>300</sup> Katz (2006: 2-3).

<sup>301</sup> Abbey *et al.* (2004: 275-276) survey the research and find consistent evidence that around 50% of both perpetrators and victims of sexual assault had been drinking alcohol. As they note, 'the strong correlation between perpetrators' and victims' alcohol consumption makes it difficult to examine the independent effects of each individual's intoxication' (Abbey *et al.* 2004: 276).

<sup>302</sup> E.g. Yoffe (2013): 'College women: Stop getting drunk'. Yoffe goes on to write that 'the truth' is that women 'are responsible for keeping their wits about them', and that young women 'have to understand safety begins with you.' Schulte (2015) reports 'expert' advice under the following headings: 'As a freshman girl, be on guard during the first few weeks of school... Always have a "battle buddy" when going out. Don't go off alone.... Don't drink.'

co-responsible for her assault because common-sense maps of actual social causation are animated by one or both of these norms.

Since we commonly judge her action as one that matters in the production of the assault outcome, she is deemed causally responsible for it and therefore agent responsible too. To translate this view into everyday parlance, these women are seen as 'asking for it' (to some degree at least) through the risks they intentionally take. In philosophical parlance, they are seen as co-responsible to some degree because, by intentionally and knowingly taking risks, the assault 'stems appropriately from' or 'suitably reflects' their agency.<sup>303</sup>

We can now explain and vindicate the feminist claim that 'no matter what someone has done or failed to do, they did not cause their sexual assault.'<sup>304</sup> Feminists strongly deny that the action of drinking alone while female is one that matters for ethico-political enquiry since our woman simply exercised the same freedom that many men exercise without second thought. Her drinking alone is an irrelevant background condition, not an actual cause; assault does not stem appropriately from nor suitably reflect our victim's intentional actions. Pointing to the action of drinking alone in public as causally responsible for assault is like pointing to the presence of oxygen as causally responsible for a wildfire; it impermissibly calls attention to entirely the wrong thing. Because of this, feminists hold that the dominant prescriptive norm is misguided: women should not be required to curtail their basic freedoms in order to avoid sexual assault.

We likewise insist that in normative political debates about how we, as a society,

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<sup>303</sup> E.g. Stemplowska (2009: 245) - for a fuller discussion of Stemplowska's position on cases like this see Chapter 3, Section 3. Knight and Stemplowska (2011b: 12-13) define agent responsibility by drawing on the idea that an outcome must 'stem appropriately' from an intentional action; Vallentyne (2008: 58) says that the outcome must 'suitably reflect' one's agency.

<sup>304</sup> DC Rape Crisis Centre (2016).

collectively understand and handle sexual assault, the current statistical norm is irrelevant. These debates are about what we as a society ought to do, and one of the things we ought to do is to ensure that women living their lives in perfectly normal, acceptable ways does not put them at risk. Basing authorship ascriptions on the statistical norm that drinking alone while female risks assault grounds these debates on the assumption that this norm cannot be challenged or changed – it naturalises the current situation.

For example, Susan Griffin writes that, '[f]rom a very early age I, like most women, have thought of rape as part of my natural environment', and she argues that this fear serves to keep women modest and out of public spaces (among other things).<sup>305</sup> The feminist approach assumes stopping sexual assault is possible – and that while assault remains so commonplace, women cannot necessarily avoid it no matter how much they curtail their lives.<sup>306</sup>

It is therefore the *right* prescriptive norm on which we must base our map of actual social causation – and thus our authorship attributions. Prescriptive norms about what various agents ought to have done regarding the outcome in question are what matter in ethico-political debates about how we, collectively, ought to handle cases of sexual assault. Because of this, authorship attributions used in normative political debates like these themselves have important ethico-political dimensions.

In this case, the right prescriptive norm insists that drinking alone while female ought not produce sexual assault. Within functioning political communities women ought not be obligated to protect themselves from assault by curtailing their basic freedoms. Feminist authorship attributions fight the dominant naturalisation of

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<sup>305</sup> Griffin (1979: 3).

<sup>306</sup> For a classic argument about the value-laden nature of political science's explanatory frameworks, including the normative significance of assumed possibilities and impossibilities, see Taylor (1973).

sexual assault by insisting that women should not be expected to shoulder extra costs because other groups shirk *their* basic obligations: the perpetrator his obligation to respect others' rights, and the state its obligation to protect people from this kind of violence.<sup>307</sup>

Picking everything in the causal structure leading to the assault as an actual cause (as Peter Vallentyne does<sup>308</sup>) impermissibly draws attention in very many counterproductive directions – the bar owner's opening that night, the perpetrator's parents' allowing their adult son normal independence, and the woman's choice to have a drink. Worse, mentioning *only* the perpetrator's and victim's actions (as Zofia Stemplowska and much rape prevention discourse does) impermissibly focuses even more attention on our women's actions as one of just a couple that matter for producing sexual assaults.

Due to how closely we often associate agent responsibility with consequential and moral responsibility (i.e. holding that authorship of an outcome implies justly shouldering its benefits and burdens and being praiseworthy or blameworthy for it), these agent responsibility ascriptions can have serious implications. A study by Jago and Christenfeld, for example, found that 'increased victim blaming does occur as a result of victim-focused risk avoidance seminars' – if we are told that what matters for the production of assaults are victims' actions and omissions, we are more likely to blame victims for assault.

Now, in response to this we could do as Stemplowska does: bite the bullet on

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<sup>307</sup> We can generalise this logic: in most cases, potential victims of rights infringements are not obligated to curtail their basic freedoms to avoid these infringements, meaning they are not causally co-responsible for infringements if and when they occur. The caveat of 'most cases' reflects the possibility that we might be co-responsible for intentionally sought rights infringements – but many rights infringements (like sexual assault) violate the victim's consent by definition.

<sup>308</sup> Vallentyne (2008: 61, 64). For discussion of Vallentyne's position see Chapter 3, Section 3.



victims' co-authorship but then deny that authorship justifies the resulting disadvantage in cases like this.<sup>309</sup> I am not averse to this latter denial, having no strong attachment to the responsibility-sensitive egalitarian goal of a theory of justice centred, first and foremost, around the relationship between agent responsibility and what distributive shares we each deserve. But Stemplowska's position concedes too much to start with. By accepting this common-sense authorship attribution, she unintentionally endorses common sexist beliefs about who holds what socio-political obligations – even if she then explicitly denies that women who do not shoulder these obligations can be justly left to shoulder the burdens of their refusal.<sup>310</sup>

In contrast, feminist good sense dictates that the actions that matter for producing sexual assaults include the action of sexually assaulting someone and any actions that (re)produce patriarchal legal and social practices which enable or promote such assaults. By allowing this feminist good sense to inform our background political schema, we articulate a more egalitarian conception of responsibility.<sup>311</sup>

### 5.3.2. *Homelessness*

What of Ben, who is homeless and normally deemed solely agent responsible for this outcome because his flat burned down when he left a candle alight unattended? As argued in Chapter 4, whether or not Ben is commonly held solely responsible for his homelessness hinges on our assumptions about what various agents' responsibilities-as-obligations were regarding this outcome. But egalitarians must make these assumptions explicit, interrogate them, and rewrite them wherever

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<sup>309</sup> Stemplowska (2009: 245).

<sup>310</sup> As with this case, so with the cases of unpaid carework and homelessness too: Stemplowska's approach implicitly accepts unequalitarian norms by endorsing common-sense responsibility attributions. Since Stemplowska takes common-sense authorship attributions for granted, she would also struggle to account for the dynamics of political responsabilisation; here too I believe that my political account fares better.

<sup>311</sup> In this paper and throughout this thesis I assume that any proper conception of egalitarianism entails a robust commitment to feminism, anti-racism, and against class-based oppression and domination.

appropriate. Again, we can do this because what matters for the normal purposes of normative political enquiry is not current statistical norms, nor currently dominant prescriptive norms, but the right prescriptive norms.

Suppose we live in a state that standardly leaves homeless people on the streets after catastrophic accidents so that no one expects otherwise. When undertaking ethico-political debates about how we, as a political collective, ought to deal with homelessness in general or Ben's homelessness in particular, this statistical norm is not what matters.<sup>312</sup> If we are using Ben's authorship to guide normative political arguments about how our society should function, animating his authorship using current statistical norms insidiously bakes the status quo into our conclusions.<sup>313</sup>

Instead, we need to know what the right prescriptive norm is in this situation. In other words, we need to know whether Ben's state ought to help rehouse homeless people like him.<sup>314</sup> If our answer is yes, the relevant prescriptive norm conflicts with the relevant statistical norm. In such cases, it is the prescriptive norm on which we must base our map of actual social causation – and thus our authorship attributions – since prescriptive norms about what various agents ought to have done regarding the outcome in question are what matter in ethico-political debates about how our society ought to function.

Note that determining what obligations individuals and collectives hold towards

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<sup>312</sup> As argued in my introduction, when political debates hinge on individual cases it is often because these cases are presented as archetypes from which broader conclusions can be drawn.

<sup>313</sup> There is, of course, interesting political philosophical work to be done on what individuals ought to do if stuck living in an unjust or malfunctioning society (e.g. Miller 2011). However, most responsibility-sensitive egalitarian political philosophy is not aimed at this problem but rather at determining how our society ought to function (e.g. Arneson 2004; Cohen 1989; Knight 2009, 2015; Segall 2013; Stemplowska 2009, 2013; Tan 2008).

<sup>314</sup> Of course, people will disagree about what the right prescriptive norm is. But that is politics; political philosophers are supposed to be experts at advancing arguments for their preferred position in the face of substantive normative political disagreements of exactly this kind.

one another is a paradigmatically *political* question. Ben's sole responsibility is therefore not a politically neutral fact carrying independent ethico-political weight in determining state responsibilities towards him. Egalitarians who try to use Ben's sole responsibility for his homelessness as a factor in normative debates about who ought to do what (if anything) to remedy his situation beg the question at hand.

At this point, a classic responsibility-sensitive egalitarian objection goes as follows: Statistical norms tell Ben what he could reasonably expect from risking lighting a candle – an uninhabitable home and no state help to get another. Ben could have purchased housing insurance to guard against these risks. If he had done so he would not be homeless, but he chose not to. Since he chose not to insure, he is solely agent responsible for his current homelessness and therefore the state ought not help him.

This objection assumes that the availability of private insurance secures Ben's *sole* responsibility for his lack of a home. In other words, it takes Ben's failure to buy private insurance to be the only actual cause of his homelessness, thereby assuming the state's failure to help rehouse him is not an actual cause. It supposes this state omission is merely an irrelevant background enabling condition of the outcome, not one which matters for the purposes of normative political debate about who ought to help house Ben and people like him. Otherwise given the reasonable foreseeability of current state policies leaving people like Ben homeless, the state would be co-responsible for his position, which this objection rules out. In short, it assumes that the only action that matters for the purposes of this kind of normative political debate is Ben's failure to buy insurance.

The objection assumes the statistical norm 'people who buy private home insurance rarely end up homeless' is the one that matters for mapping actual social causation in this context, but that is exactly what I have argued against. In normative political

debates, what matters are prescriptive norms: what ought to have been done by whom. Thus, we need to know whether or not Ben ought to have bought private housing insurance: did he – do we all – have a responsibility as obligation to privately insure against these risks? Or are there some risks we all run that are so catastrophic, so unpredictable, and so enmeshed in how wider society functions, that we ought to collectively insure against them in the form of public support for anyone who falls afoul of them? To work out whose actions and omissions are causally responsible for Ben's homelessness, we are therefore forced back to our original question: ought we treat homelessness as a private problem or a public one?

Nor is it question-begging to suggest citizens may have basic rights to housing (or housing assistance) since even responsibility-sensitive egalitarians think states should secure *some* bundle of inalienable basic rights such as equality before the law, freedom from discrimination and other 'liberal-democratic' rights.<sup>315</sup> If political collectives have *some* basic responsibilities as obligations towards their members, we can surely dispute where these begin and end. By simply assuming that social and economic rights cannot have this inalienable normative status, we elide important political debates. The force of the 'private housing insurance' objection trades on the fact that such an assumption has gained intuitive acceptance in large swathes of the centre-left in the last few decades.

If you remain unconvinced of the need to rely on prescriptive rather than statistical norms, imagine a parallel case of voting. Suppose you ought to have a vote, but the statistical norm is that you are often barred from voting because of your skin colour. No egalitarian would say 'sorry, but you in fact authored this outcome by failing to obtain private insurance against unfair voter disenfranchisement.' Nor does the assumed fungibility of housing set it apart from voting; 'voter insurance' need not

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<sup>315</sup> Stemplowska (2009: 245, 254). Arneson (2004: 9-10) similarly suggests that we, as a collective, have at least *some* baseline responsibilities as obligations to one another.

pay out in money – it might grant you two votes at the next election, for example.<sup>316</sup> As this case shows, when statistical and prescriptive norms come apart, statistical norms attribute inappropriate outcomes to my agency, and appeals to the availability of private insurance do not change this.

Basing our map of actual social causation on statistical norms in normative debates, then, can disguise the unjust status-quo as the outcome of victims' own supposed 'responsible agency'. This is especially problematic when the statistical norms in question are based on increasingly 'responsibilised' societies where weak and relatively powerless individuals are handed increasing amounts of personal responsibility for surviving societies with turbulent economies, crumbling welfare services, and resilient hierarchies of race, class, and gender. The statistical norms arising from such contexts have no place setting the parameters of egalitarian debates about how our society ought to function.

Furthermore, by analysing cases of just one or two individuals, the collective and individual agents we write out of our foundational examples struggle to re-enter the picture undiminished. If we start by assuming Ben the *sole* author of his homelessness by imagining away the political community and collectives he is embedded within – or assuming they hold no relevant obligations, at least – we struggle to justify anything but highly conditional public housing assistance schemes, for example.<sup>317</sup> An implicit political schema shapes these examples' very framing, singling out who the relevant agents might be and, by excluding all collective political agents, begging the question at hand. Examples tacitly assuming the state's (and other political collectives') complete

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<sup>316</sup> Furthermore, some responsibility-sensitive egalitarians do not demand in-kind compensation for political goods. For example, Segall (2013: 126-27) argues that someone denied a job because of her skin colour but offered an 'adequate' compensation package – defined as one that they would choose above the job – no longer suffers discrimination.

<sup>317</sup> See e.g. Knight (2015).

lack of obligations for remedying misfortunes unsurprisingly cause us to struggle to justify the state having any such baseline obligations.<sup>318</sup>

Acknowledging the political dimensions of authorship attributions is not a retreat into relativism; rather, it helps ensure that these attributions enshrine the right political values. If we think the state has an obligation to help rehouse Ben, for example, this can articulate an egalitarian conception of responsibility at odds with neoliberal common sense (since we will no longer see Ben as *sole* author of his homelessness). Nor are we stuck trading intuitions in a circle, as you say, ‘but he is solely responsible, so the state ought not help him’ and I reply, ‘but he is not solely responsible, because the state ought to help rehouse homeless people.’ For, luckily, debates about whether the state has these kinds of obligations need not hinge on attributions of agent responsibility.

To see this, take Jeremy Waldron’s persuasive argument that the state of homelessness seriously jeopardises people’s freedom (and dignity).<sup>319</sup> He points out that the legal performance of actions like sleeping, cooking, urinating, and so on are often denied to homeless people since they lack the legal right to a space in which to do them; these actions, however, are essential preconditions ‘for the sort of autonomous life that is celebrated and affirmed’ by liberal-democratic bundles of rights like those contained in the US constitution.<sup>320</sup> These considerations make no appeal to agent responsibility for homelessness.

Or take Katy Well’s arguments for a certain basic right to housing. She argues that anyone who is homeless or living in substandard, insecure housing has a

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<sup>318</sup> For a survey of this struggle within the responsibility-sensitive egalitarian literature, see Knight (2015); I briefly assess Knight’s conclusions in footnote 194 (p.73).

<sup>319</sup> Waldron (1991). Similarly, McTernan *et al.* (2016) suggest that the precarity and vulnerability of many in the UK housing market harmfully jeopardises social relations of equality, and they use this as a reason to motivate greater state intervention in housing to mitigate this precarity.

<sup>320</sup> Waldron (1991: 320).

socioeconomic right to housing, and that this right is held against the state.<sup>321</sup> Her arguments for this do not simply assert that the state has such an obligation, or that people are not solely agent responsible for their homelessness. Rather, she bases such a right on the need to protect people's interest in being able to develop and execute 'a life plan that is in some sense one's own.'<sup>322</sup> We can and must have productive debates about whether or not socioeconomic rights held against the state exist. Once we have done so we are far better placed to make determinate and fair authorship attributions in cases like Ben's.

More egalitarian authorship attributions are therefore both possible and important. Drawing on common-sense authorship attributions in political debates about how society ought to function risks placing conservative limits on these debates, by tacitly and mistakenly invoking current statistical norms or common-sense prescriptive norms as if they are apolitical facts. In these contexts, authorship attributions should be animated by the right prescriptive norms: those which hold the various agents involved to fair, egalitarian expectations and obligations regarding the outcome in question.

### *5.3.3. Carework: Determining Responsibility's Flow*

How does this argument bear on unpaid carework cases? Dominant authorship attributions rest on the assumption that Sylvia's carework only matters within the private realm; recall the widespread assumption that feminized caring labour has no productive impact in the sphere of public, economic value.<sup>323</sup> For this reason, these dominant authorship attributions attribute to Sylvia all and only the outcomes of her happy partner, clean house, and poverty.

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<sup>321</sup> Wells (2018: 3).

<sup>322</sup> Wells (2018: 4).

<sup>323</sup> Folbre (1991:464) – my emphasis.

Again here, the dominant norms underlying common-sense authorship attributions contradict egalitarian good sense: those egalitarian prescriptive norms which value labour activities fairly and do not endorse a sexist public-private cut. And, again, egalitarians can and should challenge dominant norms that contradict this egalitarian picture, rather than tacitly endorse them as apolitical 'common sense.' For they are neither apolitical or incontestable; whether and how to draw such a public-private divide and how to demarcate valuable work from unproductive leisure are paradigmatic political questions.

Moreover, political philosophers already have resources to challenge such assumptions. For example, socialist feminists and feminist political economists have long argued that Sylvia's unpaid, undervalued carework is of *fundamental* importance to the maintenance of both formal economic productivity and a properly functioning society. As Wendy Brown notes, women '*are the invisible infrastructure sustaining a world of putatively self-investing human capitals.*'<sup>324</sup>

This feminist perspective challenges common-sense understandings of the public-private divide, insisting that carework is work, and redefining the private sphere as one of relations of production and reproduction.<sup>325</sup> It argues that men benefit economically from unwaged carework and that capitalism relies on it to depress labour costs. And it challenges the idea that capitalist market mechanisms fairly individuate and value carework's productive impact; some socialist feminists argue that women should be paid a wage for this work by the state.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Brown (2015: 106-7). And some women more than others: home care workers in the US are disproportionately women of colour (Boris and Klein 2012). Similarly, domestic work is increasingly outsourced to migrant women in the UK (Lutz 2011).

<sup>325</sup> Federici (2012: 97). Folbre (1991) gives historical context.

<sup>326</sup> On the former, see Folbre (1995). Federici (2012: 15-22) adds the latter claim.



Note that Silvia did not *choose her poverty* - she was never offered a wage for carework which she declined. Rather, her poverty is seen to 'stem appropriately' from her intentional carework by the dominant actual causation map but not by the dissident feminist one.<sup>327</sup> These answers differ over which actions in the causal structure matter for producing her poverty and why; the common-sense one begins and ends with her decision to risk poverty to do unpaid, apparently unproductive work. A more egalitarian map, however, does two things differently.<sup>328</sup>

First, it insists that Sylvia authors more than common sense dictates. It holds Sylvia co-responsible for her partner's economic success and other social and economic benefits, notwithstanding that current practices do not reward her for these. As such, any money given in recognition of her work would not be a 'subsidy' for an 'individual choice' but a wage earned for a vital social contribution.<sup>329</sup>

Second, a more egalitarian map of actual social causation interrogates the idea that Sylvia is the sole author of her poverty. For the purposes of normative political debate, Sylvia's carework may not even make the list of actions that matter in the causal structure leading to her poverty. At very least, this map would likely insist that her actions were one of many that matter in generating this outcome; it would likely call attention to all the (collective and individual) actions which create and reproduce practices ensuring the socio-economic benefits of her work systematically flow to others, leaving her financially vulnerable and impoverished.

In cases of homelessness, sexual assault, and carework, then, we can and should challenge common-sense authorship attributions and articulate egalitarian good-

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<sup>327</sup> I limit discussion to two 'maps' for simplicity. There will likely be many more, each with their own areas of dominance.

<sup>328</sup> If we are egalitarian, we might ask, why concern ourselves with agent responsibility at all? If it has all these problems and tricky pitfalls, why not simply theorise without it? I address this issue in Chapter 6, Section 2.

<sup>329</sup> Cf. Knight (2005: 60-62).

sense alternatives. More generally, this is the case wherever the common-sense norm animating actual causation judgements (be it statistical or prescriptive) fails to match the relevant egalitarian good sense norm.

#### *5.3.4. Carework: Determining Degrees of Responsibility*

Drawing on egalitarian actual causation maps lets us attribute causal responsibility to the right agents. And it lets us correctly map responsible agency's flow as travelling from an action to all and only those outcomes it is fair for agents to expect to arise from those outcomes; it is not fair to expect drinking alone while female to result in sexual assault, for example. This leaves one last indeterminacy to resolve in a more egalitarian fashion than common-sense dictates: that of dividing agent responsibility between multiple authors.<sup>330</sup>

Happily, we are now well placed to explore what an egalitarian resolution of this indeterminacy involves. Blocking responsibility's flow from intentional actions to some of their nonetheless foreseeable consequences rests on an actual causation map outlining what in the causal structure *matters* for our purposes. This picture helps illuminate gradated divisions of responsibility since completely blocking responsibility's flow from an intentional action to a foreseeable consequence is the limit case of dividing responsibility between authors; to insist our assault victim holds *no* responsibility for the assault is just to insist on a certain division of responsibility.

Let's return to the carework case to explore the implications of this. Suppose we accept Sylvia co-authors some part of her partner's firm's economic productivity.<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> For a full explanation of these three indeterminacies see Chapter 4, Section 3.

<sup>331</sup> If so, she will of course be one of many that do so: cleaners, delivery drivers, employees' healthcare workers, etc. These activities are standardly evaluated as economically productive and therefore relevant to the firm's success – that is why no one questions that they warrant a wage from either the firm or their individual employers.

What *degree* of authorship does she have over this outcome? Our dominant political schema individuates and values her activities by appeal to capitalist market mechanisms, norms and practices. These set her degree of authorship at zero because they evaluate her activities as economically unproductive and therefore irrelevant: recall old arguments about how housewives were/should be dependents and newer ‘truths’ of neoclassical economics which see an individual’s market wage as indicative of productive output. And recall how within political philosophy, too, market wages are often the assumed mechanism for ascertaining to what degree workers’ actions matter for generating outcomes.

But, given the large and growing inequalities and the entrenched undervaluation of feminised (and raced) forms of labour within capitalist market economies, egalitarians should be wary of assuming markets adequately solve all or most of the problems of dividing responsibility.<sup>332</sup> At the bare minimum, we must first specify carefully what kind of market mechanisms animated by what kind of property and legal systems we think can divide responsibility fairly.<sup>333</sup>

This is a question of *fair* division – a normative political question – because again the appropriate norms to animate our actual social causation map are the right prescriptive norms about what actions matter, and to what degree, in producing what kind of outcomes. There is no value-neutral way to divide authorship amongst the individuals whose actions contribute to a joint outcome. For one thing, it is impossible to tell whether it was the additional worker who solely caused the

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<sup>332</sup> Piketty (2014). Chapters 7-8 discuss the undervaluation of raced and feminised labour in greater depth.

<sup>333</sup> Despite her suggestion that markets can still solve the majority of puzzles of dividing responsibility, Stemplowska (2009: 247) goes furthest towards acknowledging this within the responsibility-sensitive paradigm; she refers to a marketized society with equal initial distributions as ‘neutral’ but not ‘entirely neutral’ because, she explains, though market mechanisms themselves can be neutral, the initial divisions cannot be. I would also contest the idea that market mechanisms can be ‘neutral’ in any meaningful sense of the word (see Chapter 7, Section 3.3, and Chapter 8, Section 3).

increase in productivity, or whether the machines and other workers functioned more efficiently or worked harder themselves because of her extra input.<sup>334,335</sup>

To divide their authorship, we must make judgements about the degree to which their actions mattered in producing the final product. There is no value-neutral way to ‘unscramble the eggs’ as it were; with jointly produced outcomes, there is no purely descriptive way to ascertain whose individual contribution produced what exact degree of output. The necessary judgements remain evaluative, even if they are hidden within the background assumptions of complex economic formulae.

Since there is no way to make these authorship divisions without evaluative judgements, we might as well ensure we use the right ones. The carework case adds support to Anne Phillips’ argument that market mechanisms *necessarily* operate through historically specific conventions and norms<sup>336</sup> – in this case sexist ones. For what is the market price of care without these sexist norms demarcating the public/productive from the private/unproductive? No such price exists.<sup>337</sup> Even *if* we think markets adequate for assessing what inputs matter and to what degree, we must specify what kind of markets, given shape by what social relationships, norms, institutions, and conventions, we think adequate for this role.

We might also want to address what limits ought to be placed on these markets. We may think certain kinds of market (underlain and animated by a certain set of norms, relationships and institutions) adequate for assessing what inputs matter to what degree for outcomes like industrial food production. Yet we may well balk at

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<sup>334</sup> For further discussion see Pullen (2009: 134-144).

<sup>335</sup> Nor need market price be a good measure of the socio-political value of an action, as the case of carework illustrates so well. For discussion see Olsaretti (2009: 68-70).

<sup>336</sup> Phillips (2008).

<sup>337</sup> Even if we try to arrive at a price through a hypothetical, idealised market (following something like Dworkin’s approach) the question remains: in the idealised market, how do participants understand and value carework? I discuss this in Chapter 6, Section 2.1.

using these to assess authorship for outcomes like large-scale environmental destruction, road traffic, gendered violence, education, friendship, or flourishing democratic communities, for example. Surely we do not want to evaluate all responsibility attributions through market mechanisms (however ameliorated their form)?

We must also consider how we might secure such social relations, institutions, and market limits, given our failures to do so in real life (and the profoundly inegalitarian results of these failures). Here it seems fruitful for political philosophers to acknowledge the close connection between markets and capitalism. The creep of marketization did not occur at random because we took our eye off the ball. Rather, the process is driven by capitalist incentives to exploit new sources of profit and establish new orders of political reason to justify such expansion and exploitation. Egalitarians investigating how we might go about putting marketized divisions of authorship in their place would therefore do well to recognise this practical connection between market mechanisms and capitalism<sup>338</sup> – if they are interested in realising their theoretical conclusions in the real world, that is.<sup>339</sup>

The responsibilisation of the last few decades has gone hand in hand with an unshakable, almost unremarked, faith in the ability of capitalist markets to individuate and value agents' inputs fairly.<sup>340</sup> I have tried to show how this faith has sometimes seeped into parts of political philosophy. Feminists and socialists have long pointed out the flaws in such faith, struggled to de-naturalise and repoliticise

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<sup>338</sup> Brown (2014) discusses the importance of this issue in greater depth.

<sup>339</sup> I think part of the point of doing political philosophy is to promote justice. Cf. Swift (2008: 367) who argues that political philosophers need not aim at promoting justice any more than violinists, say. I recognise that my argument here will not touch those political philosophers only interested in collecting politically useless but elegant truths about justice in imagined worlds. For discussion see Chapter 1 ('A Note on Methodology').

<sup>340</sup> Brown (2015, 2016) outlines how this faith in markets has operated to transform practices and modes of political reason in euro-Atlantic societies.

market mechanisms and outcomes, and to reconnect marketization to capitalism.<sup>341</sup> Egalitarians drawing on responsibility in normative political debate cannot duck these thorny issues. Not least because to satisfactorily resolve our third and last indeterminacy – that of determining degrees of responsibility – we need to settle on *fair* methods of individuating and evaluating agents' inputs into joint outcomes. Without very careful specification, markets cannot be presumed to resolve this indeterminacy in egalitarian ways.

#### 5.4. A Note on Reasonable Foreseeability

Agent responsibility requires both causal responsibility and that the outcome be a reasonably foreseeable consequence of an intentional action. In Chapter 3 I argued that reasonable foreseeability relies on causal responsibility: if we think action  $x$  risks causing or will cause outcome  $y$ , it is reasonable to foresee that doing  $x$  risks or will result in  $y$ . This means that the political dimensions of responsibility's causal condition transmit directly to its reasonable foreseeability condition. In other words, to determine what is reasonably foreseeable, we must look to the good-sense actual causation maps discussed above.

There is an inbuilt conservatism in supposedly apolitical common-sense interpretations of reasonable foreseeability as agents only commonly foresee what dominant understandings and practices render visible to them. (If they foresee differently it is *despite* and in the face of dominant common sense.) If a dominant map of actual causation delimits casual responsibility in a way that unfairly undervalues or ignores

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<sup>341</sup> The work of Folbre (1995) and Federici (2012) are good examples of the former. E.g. 'an emphasis on rewarding caring has somewhat anti-market implications, simply because the market does not elicit caring' - Folbre (1995: 85). Likewise, Federici (2012) and Brown (2015) both insist on the latter connection.

an oppressed group's social contributions, we cannot expect the oppressed group to easily trace the benefits their undervalued contributions produce.<sup>342</sup>

Our dominant map hinders women's ability to foresee the wider social and economic benefits of their carework, for example. Silvia's financial dependence leaves her particularly vulnerable but casting her as the only 'dependent' in this relationship occludes her partner's and wider society's fundamental dependence on unpaid carework.<sup>343</sup> The unconscious, naturalised operation of common-sense schemas and practices renders this occlusion all the more effective. Do less benefits really 'stem appropriately' from Silvia's work because, given dominant understandings, she and women like her may not (nor could we fairly expect them to) currently foresee these benefits? Such a position unfairly privileges the status quo.<sup>344</sup>

Reasonable foreseeability must therefore play a role in our understanding of responsibility in a way that accounts for the epistemic effects of unequal power relations. Specifically, it should deem the consequences of our actions reasonably foreseeable if our *good-sense* map of actual causation identifies that action as a cause of the outcome. A map based on egalitarian good sense holds carework to be an important cause of a wide range of social and economic goods. Likewise, it does not

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<sup>342</sup> This is another way in which 'practices of ignorance are often intertwined with practices of oppression and exclusion' (Tuana and Sullivan 2006: 1) (also discussed on p.65). Egalitarians must take seriously the insights of feminist social epistemology when epistemic concepts animate their theories of justice. In this, I follow Mills' (2005: 169) critique of ideal theorists' habit of not recognising, let alone theorising, the 'consequences of oppression for the social cognition of agents.'

<sup>343</sup> Folbre (1991); Brown (2015: 106). Even Anderson's (1999: 297-298) powerful critique mentions only one-way dependency.

<sup>344</sup> Hence my scepticism about Dworkin's (2002: 289-90) reliance on 'ordinary ethical experience' to distinguish 'choice' from 'circumstance.' Some carers might view their financial vulnerability as personal choice, others as unfair circumstance. Carrying the 'familiar structure of our personal morality... into politics intact' (Dworkin 2002: 294) and considering this problem solved sidesteps essential political debates over how to understand care work. Political philosophy should interrogate 'ordinary' views on the distinction between personal choice ('private') and circumstance ('public'), not uncritically adopt them while simultaneously denying their political nature.

deem assault a reasonably foreseeable consequence of drinking while female; agents within functioning political communities should not reasonably expect this action to result in assault.

The ‘reasonableness’ in question therefore has important ethico-political dimensions. More specifically, the reasonable foreseeability condition inherits the causal condition’s normative foundations. The foreseeability condition therefore fits neatly with the above resolutions of our three indeterminacies and inherits these resolutions’ political dimensions: it is reasonable to foresee our action resulting in a certain outcome if and only if our good sense map deems this action an actual cause of the outcome.

At this point it is useful to re-situate my conception of agent responsibility within the wider responsibility taxonomy I have been working with. Recall that this taxonomy distinguishes agent responsibility from four other kinds: causal (I caused *x*), consequential (the burdens/benefits that stem from *x* are justly mine to shoulder/enjoy), moral (I am blameworthy/praiseworthy for *x*), and responsibility as obligation (I have obligations regarding *x*).<sup>345</sup> To end this section, I outline how my proposed understanding of agent responsibility relates to these other forms of responsibility in order to show why my understanding is still a form of agent responsibility (rather than, for example, a rejection of the very idea of agent responsibility or an argument that the concept collapses into some other kind of responsibility).

First, on my analysis agent responsibility remains a subset of causal responsibility: the subset of *intentional* causal outcomes and the reasonably foreseeable parts of the causal chains stemming from these outcomes. As discussed, I understand causal responsibility to be extremely context-dependent: maps of actual causation pick out the actions that matter for a particular context or enquiry. Agent responsibility remains a subset of

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<sup>345</sup> I borrow these definitions from Knight and Stemplowska (2011b: 11).



causal responsibility since, even in political-philosophical enquiries, intentional actions are not all that matter. For example, material structures, social rules, technologies, and cultural tropes can all matter enormously in political-philosophical enquiry, meaning it often makes sense to judge these things actual causes of political outcomes. Agent responsibility does not collapse into causal responsibility, then.

The subset of causal chains picked out by common-sense agent responsibility is determined by dominant social norms regarding what outcomes ought to and/or tend to follow from what intentional actions (and therefore which intentional actions are commonly taken to matter in producing which outcomes). Egalitarian agent responsibility picks out a different subset of causal chains – a subset determined by an egalitarian map of actual social causation designed to *understand and evaluate intentional actions in a way that treats all agents with equal respect and concern*. This principle informs its judgements of social productivity – its judgements about which actions matter in the production of which outcomes.

How does agent responsibility relate to responsibility as obligation? Responsibilities as obligations are an important input into determinations of authorship, but the concept of agent responsibility again remains distinct. Obligations are an important input because one of the important ways we treat one another as equals is by expecting us all to fulfil a set of social obligations towards one another that express our equality.<sup>346</sup> For example, in the assault case the victim's lack of an obligation to curtail her basic freedoms to avoid assaults is a key reason for her lack of agent responsibility; it is inequalitarian to expect some portion of the population to curtail their basic freedoms to avoid sexual assault. To treat her with the same respect and concern we treat others in society with, we cannot expect her to fulfil this sexist obligation.

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<sup>346</sup> This need not mean everyone has exactly the same obligations; we might think those lucky enough to amass the most wealth are obligated to pay the most back into society, for example.

Still, this egalitarian set of political obligations does not fully determine the concept of agent responsibility. Take someone who spends 50 hours a week undertaking socially valuable but underpaid carework. He remains agent responsible for this work, but not because he fulfils or violates a set of responsibilities as obligations – no one could fairly be obligated to perform so much underpaid work. Instead, he is agent responsible because of our egalitarian understanding of the social value of the work he performs – an understanding and an evaluation of carework practices that treats all agents with equal respect and concern (rather than devaluing carework because of its patriarchal association with women).

As this case suggests, determinations of agent responsibility are influenced by far more than obligations alone. Our political understandings of social identities, social ‘spheres’ (like the public-private divide), and socio-political actions and practices (like caring) can and do all influence agent responsibility attributions. An egalitarian map of actual social causation will draw on all of these elements and more in order to understand and evaluate social actions in a way that treats all agents with equal respect and concern.

Of course, in cases of structural injustice, all these elements – socio-political identities, social demarcations, political-economic evaluations of actions, and political obligations – often work together. Our public-private divide works with our evaluation of caring activities, a gendered set of social obligations, and our political understandings of womanhood as a social identity to keep women locked into a subordinate social role, for example. But it flattens far too much to reduce all these important determinants of agent responsibility to a set of responsibilities as obligations.

How does my analysis of agent responsibility relate to moral responsibility? I argue that all determinations of agent responsibility within ethico-political contexts importantly involve moralised judgements. But this does not make agent responsibility

the same as moral responsibility, nor can the former be reduced to the latter, for agent responsibility attributions need not rest on moral responsibility judgements specifically. Suppose you spend weeks painting a self-portrait. You are the primary person agent responsible for the picture, regardless of whether you are morally praiseworthy or blameworthy for your actions.

Rather, this authorship ascription rests on our understandings of how important various actions were in producing this outcome: understandings that revolve around interpreting the social importance of things like time, energy, skill, and individual creativity. These understandings need not evaluate your moral praiseworthiness or blameworthiness. Therefore, though agent responsibility is a moralised concept – it draws on ethico-political evaluations of which actions matter for the production of which outcomes – it is not the same as, nor does it collapse into, the concept of moral responsibility.

What of consequential responsibility? One might assume that insisting on the ethico-political dimensions of agent responsibility strengthens the foundational responsibility-sensitive egalitarian assumption that agent responsibility implies consequential responsibility – i.e. that if I am agent responsible for outcome  $x$ , the burdens and benefits of  $x$  are justly mine to shoulder and/or enjoy.

Granted, my politicised understanding of agent responsibility aims to facilitate a re-evaluation of overlooked and undervalued work by oppressed groups and to widen theoretical space for arguments in favour of unconditional, collectively provisioned goods and services grounded in egalitarian political obligations. And this could be used as a first step in reasserting the more general responsibility-sensitive egalitarian belief that justice dictates you bear or enjoy what you are agent responsible for.

However, in the next chapter I will argue that my analysis of agent responsibility gives us good reason to move away from theories of justice primarily centred around the concepts of choice and agent responsibility. As a result, I suggest we move beyond the responsibility-sensitive egalitarian paradigm rather than focusing attention on resuscitating their foundational premise as the cornerstone of distributive justice.<sup>347</sup>

My conception of agent responsibility cannot therefore be reduced to one of causal, moral, responsibility as obligation, though it is importantly animated by ethico-political concerns, causal webs, and networks of political obligations. Rather, my conception ties issues of political obligation, morality, and causality together, while preserving the foundational model of agent responsibility: that of causation, intention, and reasonable foreseeability. For this reason, my analysis is not a *reductio* of the concept, but rather an argument for an alternative, expanded understanding of how the concept works – and, certainly, an argument that the concept cannot serve as a *foundational* building block for ethico-political theorising.<sup>348</sup>

## 5.5. In What Sense ‘Political’?

Determinate authorship attributions within the political sphere rest on ethico-political judgements. I emphasise the need for critical normative interrogation of these judgements, and in this I depart from some other ‘political’ approaches within philosophy; I do not seek stability or political neutrality in an ‘overlapping

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<sup>347</sup> See Chapter 6, section 2. Note that regardless of whether or not we are interested in reasserting the foundational responsibility-sensitive egalitarian belief that agent responsibility implies consequential responsibility and building a theory of distributive justice around it, agent responsibility does not collapse into consequential responsibility, since I remain consequentially responsible for, e.g. basic social duties without necessarily being agent responsible for them. On this point see p.122, especially footnote 315.

<sup>348</sup> One of responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism’s chief appeals is that it appears to deliver a whole distributive framework from a few apparently simple foundational premises; as Stemplowska (2012: 389) puts it, it is attractive because it delivers ‘radical conclusions’ from ‘relatively weak assumptions’. But I hope to have shown that assumptions of authorship are far from weak or simple, nor are they foundational. The responsibility-sensitive project therefore loses this source of appeal.

consensus' on responsibility attributions, nor do I uncritically look to social practices to inform my account.<sup>349</sup> Rather, I impress the importance of making the influence of political schemas and practices explicit in order to critique their fairness. What my account does have in common with other political accounts (of justice, or human rights, say) is a broad insistence that the basic social institutions and collectives we live within unavoidably shape us; we cannot 'subtract ourselves' from this socio-political background.<sup>350</sup>

Some responsibility-sensitive egalitarians understand themselves to be doing 'pure, context-free philosophizing' by drawing on agent responsibility under the idealised circumstances of an initially equal opportunities baseline.<sup>351</sup> But the preceding arguments show the importance of recognising that 'all theorising – moral and non-moral – takes place in an intellectual realm dominated by concepts, assumptions, norms, values, and framing perspectives that reflect the experiences and group interests of the privileged group.'<sup>352</sup> Since the concept of agent responsibility – like all politically laden concepts – is deeply shaped by its real-world conditions of use, the promise of 'context-free' philosophising is a mirage.<sup>353</sup>

As argued, recognising this need not lead to relativism; it is not contradictory to emphasise both our social embeddedness and the importance of first-order normative critique. However, admittedly doing so relies on the possibility of some form of 'ideology critique': it must be possible to sensibly argue about which

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<sup>349</sup> On the relevance of these ideas to other 'political' accounts, see Valentini (2012: 185-87).

<sup>350</sup> Valentini (2012: 184).

<sup>351</sup> Swift (2008: 372). Dworkin's instruction to abstract away all preferences tainted by raced, gendered, and classed 'prejudice' means he similarly aims to theorise distributive equality free from the context of structural injustice.

<sup>352</sup> Mills (2005: 175).

<sup>353</sup> As McTernan (2015: 6) asks, 'from where but our experience of ordinary practices of responsibility [attribution] are our intuitions about responsibility in hypothetical cases supposed to stem?'

political schema is best – fairest, most egalitarian – despite how deeply they structure our orientation to, and understanding of, the world.<sup>354</sup>

Not everything goes here. Ideology critique does not disregard truth; rather, good theorising necessitates ‘select[ing] from the mass of truths those that address our broader cognitive and practical demands.’<sup>355</sup> Every socio-political outcome is enmeshed in multiple complex causal webs; we must select from this mass of causal truths by asking which contributions matter for normative political debate. We do not retreat into relativism, therefore, but prompt the critical interrogation of authorship attributions to ensure they enshrine the right values.

My account suggests that arguments which defend the fairness of particular methods of structuring social cooperation by appeal to the normative significance of respecting particular ‘choices’ are circular. For example, arguing from the assumption that our unpaid carer authors none of her partner’s economic output to the conclusion that currently dominant marketized practices are uniquely placed to respect responsibility, hits this circularity; she lacks this authorship only on the assumption that current market mechanisms instantiate an actual causation map that fairly individuates and values agents’ inputs.

Acknowledging this encourages us to open our common-sense responsibility ascriptions to critical interrogation by our fairness intuitions. I believe our ideas of egalitarian fairness retain greater recognition of our social interconnectedness, and can help balance the inequalitarian, overly individualistic, patriarchal, and marketized tendencies of our dominant responsibility attributions – tendencies which give the idea of responsibility pride of place in right-wing thought.

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<sup>354</sup> Discussing this possibility, Haslanger points to the power of consciousness raising to disrupt dominant schemas, acknowledges that a challenge remains ‘to justify when a change in consciousness is genuinely emancipatory’ (2012a: 427), and suggests avenues for exploring this.

<sup>355</sup> Haslanger (2012d: 226).

### 5.6. Conclusion: A Political Account of Agent Responsibility

Though agent responsibility is invoked frequently in political philosophy and practice, then, it is a tricky concept to be handled with care. In Chapter 3, I introduced the concept and argued that it warranted further investigation. In Chapter 4, I outlined how standard philosophical understandings of the concept left it problematically indeterminate in three ways. I analysed how, in everyday practice, we navigate these indeterminacies to unthinkingly make determinate common-sense responsibility attributions by drawing on intuitive maps of actual social causation. Forming an important part of our political schemas, these maps guide our judgements on what kinds of actions are causally responsible for what kinds of outcomes (and what actions only constitute an outcome's background enabling conditions).

In this chapter I showed how egalitarians can critique these common-sense responsibility attributions in order to make them fairer and less conservative. This is possible because the concept of actual causation functions to single out what matters for normal purposes. What matters for the purposes of normative political debates - for example, on what political obligations we hold to one another, how our society should function, and how we, as a political collective, ought to understand and value social activities – are the right prescriptive norms, not common-sense prescriptive nor current statistical norms. In this context, normative judgements therefore saturate determinations of actual social causation. And our views on what is reasonably foreseeable, in turn, rest on these determinations.

Given this, political philosophers can and should argue about what the right prescriptive norms are in the cases of agent responsibility they want to employ. Doing so lets us articulate a concept of agent responsibility shaped by egalitarian good sense. If we are responsible for those consequences that 'stem appropriately from' or 'suitably

reflect' our agency, then 'appropriateness' and 'suitability' in this context are judgements with important, inescapable political dimensions.

The dangers of occluding the political dimensions of responsibility should worry egalitarians especially. If these dimensions are overlooked, the concept can quietly smuggle assumptions, norms and values from dominant inegalitarian schemas into supposedly egalitarian theorising. Assuming away possibly relevant collective agents, and making inegalitarian cuts between choices that matter for outcomes and those that do not, risks legitimising unjust outcomes under the cover of victims' own supposed 'responsible agency'.

Characterising these judgements as apolitical, as suggested by those who set responsibility attributions outside political philosophy, compounds this harm – it naturalises a world in which women are held responsible for protecting themselves from violence at the cost of their basic freedoms, people made homeless due to catastrophic accidents are owed no assistance from their political communities (even if community bodies shaped the catastrophes), and the fundamental social and economic contributions of unpaid carers are ignored. To mischaracterise authorship ascriptions as apolitical raw data is to dangerously depoliticise them.

Political philosophers are well placed to make the prescriptive norms contained in dominant political schemas explicit and to challenge them where necessary. Our goal, then, must *not* be to incorporate into egalitarianism 'the most powerful idea in the arsenal of the anti-egalitarian Right: the idea of choice and responsibility.'<sup>356</sup> If we are to use choice and agent responsibility in our theorising, we must form our own critical conceptions of responsibility based on egalitarian good sense instead.

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<sup>356</sup> Cohen (1989: 933).



This conclusion raises new questions, however: What use, if any, is the concept of agent responsibility, given this chapter's arguments? Should egalitarians not simply give it up altogether? The next chapter explores this issue in order to outline the wider implications of my political account of responsibility.

## 6. DECENTRING CHOICE, RECENTERING RELATIONS?

### 6.1. Introduction

Agent responsibility is certainly no political-philosophical shortcut: it cannot serve as a neutral political foundation from which to build a theory of justice without begging important questions. Determinate responsibility ascriptions are themselves based on many complex political judgements – about political obligations, political-economic productivity, and the fairness of mechanisms for socio-political evaluation, for example. Given this, what role (if any) can choice play in egalitarian thought? And how else are we to theorise distributive justice if not through the lens of choice?

This chapter answers the first question and suggests a new route of investigation to help us answer the second. I argue that we do indeed need to decentre the concepts of choice and agent responsibility from egalitarian thought. This is because approaches designed to make these concepts the *central* animating motors of our theory of distributive justice lack the theoretical resources necessary for articulating a political schema based on egalitarian good sense – a requirement of articulating egalitarian responsibility attributions. Therefore, I argue, theories dominated by these concepts lack the necessary tools for the critical egalitarian work urgently needed to challenge structural injustices of race, gender, and class.

However, I argue that we need not banish the concepts of choice and agent responsibility from egalitarian work altogether. As long as we understand their

political dimensions and use them critically, they can still serve as useful shorthand – precisely because they distil complex webs of ethico-political judgements into such short, simple statements. They can be of much use in the context of discussions of exploitation, for example.

Given the limited role I advocate for the concept of choice, I then leave the theoretical current of responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism in search of approaches better equipped to understand and challenge structural injustice. Investigating these different approaches, the second half of the chapter (and the next half of the thesis) focuses on how they conceptualise and integrate a traditional egalitarian concern with economic-distributive justice, and why this matters.

Relational egalitarianism is the obvious alternative to responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism and looks promising in many regards. However, I argue that relational egalitarianism nonetheless lacks clarity in its theorisation of the role and political significance of economic distributions. For example, Elizabeth Anderson's relational egalitarianism is not always clear on how economic-distributions relate (or do not relate) to social status hierarchies. I end by suggesting that the framework of her approach mirrors that of Nancy Fraser's 'perspectival dualism' in certain suggestive ways. Because of this, Chapter 7 then looks to perspectival dualism to see if it can improve on Anderson's theorisation of distributive justice in ways compatible with the relational egalitarian paradigm.

This topic has more than just theoretical relevance. As I discuss in greater depth in Chapters 6 and 7, the idea that within left-wing thought economic-distributive concerns have become overshadowed by feminist and anti-racist 'identity politics' has resurfaced in the wake of popular votes for Brexit and Trump.<sup>357</sup> This argument

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<sup>357</sup> For older statements of this view, see Coole (1996); Fraser (1995); Rorty (1998). For more recent restatements see Dean (2016a, 2016b); G. Fraser (2016); Goodhart (2016).

assumes that economic-distributive issues are separable from issues of identity and problematic social status hierarchies; the rest of the thesis argues that this dualism oversimplifies the relationship between distributions, status hierarchies, and identities, and suggests an alternative approach.

## **6.2. What Use is Agent Responsibility?**

In Chapter 3 I noted that responsibility-sensitive egalitarians do not much discuss structural injustices like race, gender, and class; on the whole, they leave these issues to be dealt with by other theorists. In this section I first argue that theorists who use the concepts of choice and agent responsibility have good reason to avoid this division of labour and engage critically with problems of structural injustice. However, doing so necessitates moving away from theories of justice primarily centred around the concepts of choice and agent responsibility. As a result, I suggest we need to move beyond the responsibility-sensitive egalitarian paradigm.

Given this argument for the decentring of choice and agent responsibility, and given these concepts' conservative and neoliberal genealogies, I then ask: ought egalitarians cut these concepts out of our work altogether? I argue that doing so is not necessary. As long as the political dimensions of these concepts are recognised, they can serve as useful shorthand, distilling a whole complex web of judgements about political obligations, political-economic evaluations, and socio-political understandings into simple and direct statements. I suggest that this can be particularly helpful for egalitarian discussions of exploitation.

### ***6.2.1. The Need to Decentre Choice***

To focus on one problem always requires leaving others to one side. In Chapter 3, I suggested responsibility-sensitive egalitarians tend to leave the problems of

structural injustice aside for two main reasons.<sup>358</sup> First, some theorists believe it possible to safely idealise away these problems through the imagined set up of their initial problem; they route around these issues using *idealisation*. At other times, they express the belief that these problems can be dealt with straightforwardly through their preferred choice/circumstance framework; they route around these issues using *choice*. With the arguments of Chapters 4 & 5 in hand I can now better assess these rationales – and neither looks convincing. I argue that there are good reasons for any egalitarian theorist drawing on agent responsibility to explore the problems of structural injustice instead of thinking that their work can be safely and neatly separated from this. Let's assess the two routes in turn.

Responsibility-sensitive egalitarians normally begin to theorise from an imagined egalitarian baseline from which everyone starts their adult lives with access to equal opportunities<sup>359</sup> – and racism, sexism, and classism are often assumed to be incompatible with this imagined starting point. Ronald Dworkin, for example, simply stipulates that we guarantee people's tastes and preferences are not prejudiced along racial lines before egalitarian redistribution occurs.<sup>360</sup> In contrast, he is 'neutral' about those people disadvantaged because their skills are not valued by others and so cannot command as much market income.<sup>361</sup>

As a reason for sidestepping the problems of structural injustice, however, this does not look fruitful. To see why, it is helpful to start with non-ideal cases. Take US home care workers, whose work is not valued by the market: they earn the lowest

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<sup>358</sup> These reasons are not mutually exclusive. As discussed below, Dworkin appears to endorse both, for example.

<sup>359</sup> Miller (2017) defines responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism as 'a family of theories... that treat equal distribution as a starting point but allow for departures from that baseline when these result from the responsible choices made by individuals.'

<sup>360</sup> Dworkin (2002: 161–62).

<sup>361</sup> Dworkin (2002: 162).

average hourly wages of all healthcare jobs.<sup>362</sup> They are disproportionately women of colour, and the raced and gendered history of this work and workforce has long become part and parcel of the meaning and value of the labour they do: it is devalued because of its association with women of colour, and women of colour are actively channelled towards these jobs.<sup>363</sup> The low market valuation arising from its status as ‘racialized feminized labour’ means that even men who engage in this home care work suffer this ‘wage penalty.’<sup>364</sup> In other words, the real-world market valuation of this labour looks inseparable from raced and gendered ‘prejudice.’

Similarly, recall the ‘spiralling effects’ of choice highlighted in Chapter 2, where unequal material/social contexts push certain social groups towards, or constrain them to, ‘bad choices.’ This cements negative representations of these groups as irresponsible agents – representations which then have negative effects on how others treat this group, including further retrenching their limited, unequal access to goods, services, and opportunities. When, for example, black men are treated as bad or risky customers (the makers of ‘bad choices’) these racist representations entrench their exclusion from a wide range of economic goods, services, and opportunities – ones essential to their ability to function as ‘good choosers/citizens/consumers.’ This case again suggests that there is no straightforward cut between how we, as a polity, value certain economic-distributive activities and the structures of domination that Dworkin labels ‘prejudice.’<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> Boris and Klein (2012: 6).

<sup>363</sup> See Boris and Klein (2012); England *et al.* (2002) undertake more detailed analysis of this carework wage penalty for women and men, arguing that this work’s cultural association with women partly explains the penalty. This case casts doubt on the idea that a market wage is simply or only a function of its scarcity and the utility that others derive from it. Rather than assuming such judgements of social utility are pre-political givens, the case raises the question of what political factors shape these judgements. A full political theoretical analysis of markets and market pricing is beyond the scope of this thesis, however; for this see Olsaretti (2009). For further discussion of this case, see Chapters 7 and 8. For UK parallels see p.203.

<sup>364</sup> Boris and Klein (2012: 8).

<sup>365</sup> See Chapters 7-8 for a longer argument for this point, and its significance.

Of course, Dworkin may argue that these market valuations are invalid because they instantiate racist prejudice. He is not necessarily interested in how we do, in fact, collectively value activities like these, but rather in how we should value them as worked out via thought experiments using *hypothetical* market valuations. When we are undertaking these thought experiments – imagining ourselves as a 25-year-old man deciding how to value certain social goods, for example<sup>366</sup> – how are we to value activities like caring labour?

Dworkin has little to say to help us here. Perhaps we just estimate what ‘we’ think is a reasonable, non-racist, non-sexist estimation of how our hypothetical 25-year-old man would value this work. If so then, as Anne Phillips argues, Dworkin’s hypothetical market mechanism does ‘less of the normative work than was originally proclaimed.’<sup>367</sup> Instead, what appears to be doing the normative work is Dworkin’s (or our) own common-sense beliefs about how to individuate and evaluate this labour. (Common-sense beliefs are all that can do the work here because Dworkin spends hardly any time analysing the functioning of gendered or raced injustices.<sup>368</sup>) The arguments of Chapters 4 and 5 give us reason for serious concern about this kind of uncritical reliance on common-sense evaluations of socio-political activities.

Dworkin’s comments about how, in his hypothetical insurance market, insurers would be ‘alive to the commercial importance of discouraging poor and unmarried women from becoming pregnant’ cements this concern.<sup>369</sup> Such a view endorses the sexist supposition that women alone carry the obligation to avert unwanted

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<sup>366</sup> This is what Dworkin (2002: 313) suggests we do to work out what kind of health care insurance a society ought to provide.

<sup>367</sup> Phillips (2008: 456).

<sup>368</sup> Recall, for example, Dworkin’s belief that his theory can handle gender inequalities by asking whether or not a woman would take a pill to transform her into a man (reported in Robeyns 2003: 541).

<sup>369</sup> Dworkin (2002: 339). For discussion see Armstrong (2005: 468–469).

pregnancies, as well as the tired assumption that women raising tomorrow's citizens and workers do nothing of 'commercial importance.' The belief that it is straightforward to idealise away 'prejudice', coupled with a lack of interest in or awareness of exactly how 'prejudice' functions, can result in theorising which rehashes harmful inegalitarian assumptions. The 'idealisation' rationale for not needing to explore problems of structural injustice therefore looks unconvincing.

One common responsibility-sensitive reply to arguments like these states that Dworkin is focusing on the ideal – distributive justice within prejudice-free societies – but that work like his can open the way for others to focus on the non-ideal. As John Rawls puts it 'an omission is not as such a fault.'<sup>370</sup> To this I have two replies. First, my previous arguments about the mirage of 'pure, context-free' philosophising<sup>371</sup> along with the complexity of *fully* idealising away prejudice cast some doubt on the viability of this division of labour. Just because our theories idealise away concrete distributions and unequal opportunities does not make them context-free, given how they inevitably build on concepts, practices, and intuitions grounded in the here and now.

Second, the spiralling effects of choice and the devaluation of caring labour occurs because distributive effects work *together* with recognitive effects; the dialectical nature of these processes means that idealising away one half of the spiral makes the phenomenon drop out of our theoretical picture altogether.<sup>372</sup> This matters because it facilitates Dworkin's oversimplification of racism by reducing it to 'prejudice.' As Bonilla-Silva argues, 'if the core of the phenomenon coded as "racism" is prejudice,

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<sup>370</sup> Rawls (2001: 66). See also Swift (2008).

<sup>371</sup> See Chapter 5, Section 4.

<sup>372</sup> Chapters 6 and 7 build on this idea, arguing against a distributive-recognitive dualism. Anderson (2010: 5) makes a similar but more generalised argument about how 'starting from ideal theory may prevent us from recognizing injustices in our nonideal world.'



then education and time should have cured this disease a long time ago.<sup>373</sup> Rather than a problem reducible to individual prejudices, racism is embedded in our knowledge frameworks, our social relationships, our material contexts, our distributive mechanisms, and our habitual practices. Assuming away prejudice without taking some time to investigate how it functions or how deeply and furtively engrained it remains does not give us the critical resources to understand, let alone address, the problems raced (and gendered, and classed) domination present.<sup>374</sup>

Perhaps the second responsibility-sensitive egalitarian reason for setting aside injustices of race, gender, and class fares better? This is the idea that these injustices can be easily translated into these theorists' preferred choice/compensation frameworks, meaning that their resultant theory can take care of these injustices in a fairly straightforward manner. We see this in Carl Knight's confidence that 'one could hardly choose better cases to bring out the attractions of luck egalitarianism' than racism.<sup>375</sup> And we see it in Dworkin's belief that his theory can handle gender inequalities by basing the need for compensation on whether or not a woman would take a pill to transform her into a man.<sup>376</sup>

In light of Chapters 4 and 5, we can see that naturalised common-sense responsibility attributions are often shaped by real-world structural injustices –

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<sup>373</sup> Bonilla-Silva (2015: 76).

<sup>374</sup> Cf. Valentini (2009: 346), who argues that 'by assuming socially generated inequalities away, [Dworkin's] theory enables us to appreciate that a just distribution must not be affected by prejudices and stereotypes.' In contrast, I think we only understand race-based inequalities as 'socially generated' if we *already* see them as unjust; much contemporary racism implicitly or explicitly portrays such inequalities as arising through people of colour's inferior choices or effort levels rather than through unjust social institutions or raced prejudice (Bonilla-Silva 2017: especially pp.32-34). This is why I understand apolitical notions of choice/responsible agency coupled with a lack of theorisation of the mechanisms of white supremacy as, at best, unhelpful.

<sup>375</sup> Knight (2009: 149)

<sup>376</sup> As reported in Robeyns (2003: 541). For a critical discussion of Dworkin's conception of 'authentic choice' and gender socialisation, see Mason (2000: 240–42).

harmfully reproducing and depoliticising sexist obligations and expectations, for example. Talk of ‘choosing’ the burdens of gender or race masks the fact that though someone might deeply identify with their gender or race – in some very loose sense, ‘choosing it’ – they do not thereby choose the social burdens accompanying these identities. By flattening matters of structural injustice into common-sense choice/compensation frameworks, we reduce complex social facts and relations to matters of personal tastes, de-politicised intelligence tests, and overly-naturalised responsibility attributions.<sup>377</sup>

Where does this leave us? Debating the normative significance of choice while idealising away structural injustices risks artificially omitting important mechanisms of injustice and leaving us reliant on common-sense evaluations of socio-political activities themselves tainted by sexism, racism, and classism. And supposing we can deal with structural injustices through appeal to a common-sense choice-circumstance distinction hits the same issue: it risks naturalising racist, sexist, and classist political obligations, expectations, evaluations, and understandings.

At this point the obvious responsibility-sensitive egalitarian response goes as follows: we need only develop and plug in ‘good sense’ models of agent responsibility to animate our theories – models which reject racist, sexist, or classist maps of actual social causation and responsible agency.<sup>378</sup> On such a model, women who would not choose to transform into men would not be seen to thereby author all the gendered inequalities they go on to suffer. And we could ensure that IQ tests to determine when someone is capable of responsible agency would *not* be racist.

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<sup>377</sup> Knight (2009: 128) suggests we use IQ tests to decide when someone is capable of agent responsibility. For discussion see Chapter 3, Section 2.

<sup>378</sup> For a full explanation of ‘actual social causation’ and how it animates our attributions of responsible agency, see Chapters 4 and 5.

This line of thought claims there is nothing lacking in the responsibility-sensitive paradigm that cannot simply be fixed by a more adequately politicised understanding of agent responsibility and choice. The problem is that the supplementary theorising required to develop an egalitarian political schema necessitates a fundamental shift away from the defining feature of the paradigm these theorists are so deeply invested in: the centrality of choice. Attributions of agent responsibility are themselves the *conclusion* of many important political debates – about political ontology, political norms and obligations, and the boundary between the private-unproductive/public-productive realms, among others. And we cannot resolve the debates by asking what we are agent responsible for, since to do so begs the question at hand.

It is not only that making race-, class-, and gender-neutral cuts between choice and circumstance is more complicated than it first appears. It is that making such cuts itself must build on careful analysis and critique of the workings of structural injustices. To see this, notice how my arguments for more critical, egalitarian responsibility attributions in Chapter 5 rested on feminist theorisations of patriarchal violence and socialist feminist critiques of mainstream economic practices.<sup>379</sup> A critical awareness of the workings of structural injustice is essential to any successful articulation of good sense responsibility attributions.

Accordingly, my arguments entail a comprehensive *decentring* of choice/agent responsibility; they can no longer serve as the foundational or primary conceptual

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<sup>379</sup> I went into less detail on the arguments needed to defend the socio-economic right to housing (or housing assistance) but Waldron's discussion of the relationship between homelessness and freedom similarly starts from a careful analysis of why the state of homelessness in contemporary liberal democracies is so fatal to a huge range of important freedoms. McTernan *et al.* (2016) motivate greater state involvement in securing decent housing on the basis of their analysis that the precarity and vulnerability of many in the UK housing market harmfully jeopardises social relations of equality, thereby implicitly drawing on the workings of classed structural inequalities.

mechanisms of egalitarian theorising.<sup>380</sup> The work of the responsibility-sensitive egalitarians discussed above (and others<sup>381</sup>) is so dominated by these concepts that they do not appear to have, or see much need for, other political-theoretical tools with which to construct theories of distributive justice. Recall Shlomi Segall's argument that a victim of raced discrimination given a compensation package that they would choose above the initial good denied to them no longer suffers discrimination.<sup>382</sup> Or take Dworkin's handling of racial 'prejudice' and gender. Faced with the task of trying to animate an egalitarian political schema – a task for which the choice/circumstance distinction is of scant help – we must, at the very least, compliment the responsibility-sensitive focus on choice with far broader theoretical resources.

How to start building an egalitarian political schema, then? This depends on what inequalities we are most concerned to combat, since I suggest we design our schema through careful attention to those injustices. If we accept my suggestion that raced, gendered, and classed injustices are primary candidates for this role, we would then work to identify the dominant political ontologies and maps of actual social causation that most centrally serve to (re)produce these inequalities, and the

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<sup>380</sup> Cf. Stemplowska (2009; 2013), who recognises that responsibility-sensitive egalitarians must look beyond the simple choice/circumstances division in order to build theories of distributive justice, but maintains that choice can still play a 'systematic and central' role (2009: 238).

<sup>381</sup> E.g. Rakowski (1991). The same cannot be said of responsibility-sensitive egalitarians who argue for significant 'relational' components to their overall theories of justice, e.g. Lippert-Rasmussen (2018: 181-210).

<sup>382</sup> Segall (2013: 126–27). In fact, Segall ends his discussion of raced discrimination by suggesting our intuitive recoiling from the idea that an adequate compensation package (i.e. one the agent would choose to accept above the initial good) eliminates racial discrimination might be motivated by considerations of *efficiency*. Specifically, it is more efficient in the long run to restrict anti-discrimination efforts to 'in-kind' measures, since these prevent future discrimination better than individual compensation does. In keeping with this paradigm's forays into economism, this suggests efficiency is the only other resource available to him to argue for less individualised measures of dealing with raced discrimination (see also the belief that justice can be expressed as a 'currency' (Cohen 1989) and the reliance on market mechanisms (as argued in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.iii and Chapter 5, Section 2.4)

practices accompanying them.<sup>383</sup> We would investigate how a more egalitarian ontology and map could animate different responsibility attributions and generate and entrench more egalitarian practices.

For example, the 1970s ‘Wages for Housework’ campaign analysed how the dominant political schema and practices (re)produced gendered inequalities. They highlighted the valuable consequences of women’s activities previously occluded by the dominant schema and, in doing so, critiqued prevalent responsibility attributions.<sup>384</sup> For example, ‘while it does not result in a wage for ourselves, we [women] nevertheless produce the most precious product to appear on the capitalist market: labour power.’ Or take Wendy Brown’s more recent statement that women ‘*are* the invisible infrastructure sustaining a world of putatively self-investing human capitals.’<sup>385</sup>

These responsibility attributions serve to make visible and insist on the vital importance of inputs from oppressed groups. They also help reveal how systemic inequalities are maintained through widespread social practices which funnel the fruits of these inputs certain ways while the corresponding dominant schemas deny their importance.<sup>386</sup> This approach starts from the puzzle of stable structural

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<sup>383</sup> Other obvious candidates include heterosexism and ableism though these lie beyond my scope. In Chapter 2, Section 4.1 I argue that we should displace the individual chooser as the primary locus of political theorising; this informs my suggestion here that we switch from a focus on single individual choices to a focus on social practices. Admittedly, this shift makes the boundary between causal and agent responsibility less distinct given that, as argued in Chapter 2, our individual undertakings of social practices are perhaps better understood as falling somewhere along a spectrum ranging from numb, unconscious habit to fully conscious, carefully-thought-out intentionality.

<sup>384</sup> Federici (2012: 15-22).

<sup>385</sup> Brown (2015: 106–7).

<sup>386</sup> As this focus on schemas and practices suggests, I am very sympathetic to McTernan’s ‘practice-based’ view of responsibility, especially her contention that ‘political philosophers must get their hands dirty and determine for themselves which responsibility practices are valuable given their normative commitments’ (2015: 5). However, our arguments for this conclusion

inequalities and focuses on the ideas and practices that reproduce these in an attempt to help diagnose their roots; it does not focus on two individuals in need, one of whom has imprudently lit a candle or climbed a mountain without a helmet, for example. This focus is therefore far removed from centring adjudication between the deserving and undeserving poor, as ‘Adam and Ben’-type examples attempt.

### *6.2.2. The Remaining Uses of Choice / Agent Responsibility*

If the concepts of choice/agent responsibility can no longer serve as the foundational mechanisms of egalitarian philosophy, why not cut them from our theorising altogether? What use remains for them, given their slippery nature and largely conservative pedigree? I do not advocate removing them from egalitarian theorising altogether because, as I now explain, when used in a certain way they can serve as useful shorthand – especially in discussions of exploitation.

Responsibility attributions are useful shorthand precisely because of the many complex webs of judgements that underlie each one: all those judgements about what matters for normal purposes and to what degree (including the tricky analysis of exactly what constitute these purposes). In ethico-political debates, these include judgements about which agents capable of responsible agency exist in the context in question, what we can expect of them and what their obligations are, how we individuate and attribute social value or disvalue to various outcomes, and so on. Once we recognise the political nature of many of these underlying judgements, drawing on this shorthand need not always be problematic.

For example, sometimes it is sufficient to simply say ‘what happened to me had nothing to do with where I walked or what I wore, and everything to do with the

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differ, not least because she does not aim to analyse agent responsibility specifically (see McTernan 2015: 15, footnote 1).

actions of two men.’<sup>387</sup> Or to state that ‘this oppression occurs through a steady process of the transfer of the results of the labour of one social group to benefit another.’<sup>388</sup> Sure, these attributions – refusing responsibility for assault and attributing responsibility for valuable work outcomes – necessarily rest on important debates about political value, norms, and obligations. But agent responsibility lets us knit together this intricate web of judgements and invoke it simply and quickly.

This makes the concept especially useful in discussions of exploitation’s role in reproducing structural injustices. The quote above comes from such a discussion: Iris Marion Young states that ‘the central insight expressed in the concept of exploitation... is that this oppression occurs through a steady process of the transfer of the results of the labour of one social group to benefit another.’<sup>389</sup> Without some concept of agent responsibility we cannot talk about the ‘results of labour’ of any particular social group since this is an attribution of authorship for specific outcomes to the actions of the group.

Young’s concept of exploitation is avowedly normative and she recognises that exploitative relations are enacted by ‘social rules about what work is, who does what for whom, how work is compensated, and the social processes by which the results of work are appropriated.’<sup>390</sup> These claims harmonise with my arguments about carework and suggest that Young understands these kinds of agent responsibility attributions to be political statements rather than foundational value-free claims. Young’s conception of exploitation therefore looks to draw on a politicised understanding of agent responsibility – one explicitly developed to capture the

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<sup>387</sup> Remeikis (2018).

<sup>388</sup> Young (2011a: 49).

<sup>389</sup> Young (2011a: 49).

<sup>390</sup> Young (2011a: 50).

problems of structural injustice<sup>391</sup> – as a shorthand to help facilitate her discussion of exploitation and exploitative relations.

In defending this use of a concept of agent responsibility within egalitarian theorising, I contradict Elizabeth Anderson. Arguing against Young's concept of exploitation, Anderson argues that since 'everyone's efforts causally contribute to others' productivity, it makes no normative sense to credit bits of production to the independent efforts of specific producers.'<sup>392</sup> By invoking the notion of 'causal contribution' Anderson denies *any* sensible division can be made between actual causes and background enabling conditions. Because of this, she denies that the concept of agent responsibility can be of any use (for, in a functioning society all outcomes will causally depend on multiple agents' actions).

Because Anderson believes the concept of agent responsibility makes no normative sense, she strips Young's concept of exploitation of what she perceives as its 'definition in terms of productive contributions' and re-forms it as a 'procedural' concept referring to 'the interactions of the parties.'<sup>393</sup> On this new procedural

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<sup>391</sup> On the applicability of her concept of exploitation to various structural injustices see Young (2011a: 50-52).

<sup>392</sup> Anderson (2010: 13). She makes a slightly different argument in Anderson (1999: 321 – my emphasis), writing that 'the attempt, *independent of moral principles*, to credit specific bits of output to specific bits of input by specific individuals represents an arbitrary cut in the causal web that in fact makes everyone's productive contribution dependent on what everyone else is doing.' I argue that we need not try for a concept of agent responsibility independent of moral principles; Anderson's (2010: 13) later position suggests she does not think this path viable.

<sup>393</sup> Anderson (2010: 13). Importantly, this section discusses Young's (2011a {first published 1990}) earlier analysis of exploitation (and Anderson's rejection of this), not engaging with Young's later (2011b) work on responsibility. Anderson may or may not accept Young's later proposals for how egalitarians should reason with/about responsibility; since my approach to responsibility differs from Young's later proposals, I do not explore this. (Though I share many of Young's wider concerns, I avoid her emphasis on distinguishing forward-looking responsibility from backwards-looking blame {Young 2011b: 92-122}. I understand forward- and backwards-looking considerations as entwined. First, the 'normal purposes' animating maps of actual causation will often include forward-looking considerations – we look back in order to change future outcomes. Second, and related, I do not think backward-looking responsibility attributions need necessarily descend into unhelpfully individualising, defensive distractions;



account, exploitation is instead equated with interactions like fraud, discrimination, breach of contract, and coercive imposition of contractual terms. It can no longer be described as a relationship in which one person/group's productive output is unfairly valued, transferred to, and controlled by another person/group for the latter's benefit, since we can no longer sensibly make the initial responsibility attribution.

However, Anderson's belief in the impossibility of making any agent responsibility attributions is unwarranted. For example, we can say that child-carers author/produce a certain set of valuable socio-political outcomes because their actions matter for purposes of normative-political debates about the functioning of a fair society. The act of caring for a child is not normatively indistinguishable from the act of donating sperm that conceived that child, for example, notwithstanding that both are causally necessary for producing the outcome of a well-cared-for child.

Rather, contra Anderson, it makes no normative sense *not* to credit the carer with a larger productive contribution to this outcome. The carer's ongoing labour matters more than the initial sperm donation (at least in ethico-political debates about how a fair society ought to function and how it ought to understand and value various social practices and activities). Perhaps sperm donors have some agent responsibility for any resultant cared-for children; conceivably they too provide a valuable social service. But, in normative political debates, the people who provide ongoing care for these children have greater agent responsibility for this outcome because these hours of caring labour are of central importance to the outcome (and to the reproduction of wider society more generally). Distinctions like this are not arbitrary or empty simply because they are laden with political evaluations.

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with Nussbaum {2011: xxii}, I find it 'hard to see how we ever get to the future without a critique of the past.')

Furthermore, I am unpersuaded by the wisdom of Anderson's stripped back concept of exploitation. Her position removes the possibility of any kind of social group defined to any degree by its experiences of exploitation (traditionally understood), insofar as such terms imply one group unfairly taking the results of another group's labour. This possibility, along with the understanding of exploitation accompanying it, continue to prove useful in many analyses of structural injustice.<sup>394</sup> Furthermore, it seems extremely likely that some groups suffer fraud, discrimination, and breach of contract so systematically precisely because the steady, unfair transfer of the results of their labour to others leaves them relatively powerless to resist these breaches. I worry that Anderson replaces the concept of exploitation with some of its common accompanying effects.

Last but not least, Anderson's critique of Young overlooks the fundamentally procedural/relational basis of Young's understanding of exploitation. A more charitable and fruitful interpretation of Young is readily available – one which does not understand her talk of 'productive contributions' to be problematically *foundational* to her normative analysis of the wrong of exploitation. Instead, as suggested, we can understand Young's talk of productive contributions as a shorthand way to invoke a complex web of problematically exploitative social practices and relations.

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<sup>394</sup> Exploitation, in the sense of a transfer of surplus value from workers to capitalists, is central to Marxist theory; more specifically 'it is not that the capitalist gets some of the value the worker produces, but that he gets some of the value of *what* the worker produces' (Cohen 1979: 354). For the continuing centrality of exploitation to Marxist class analysis see Dean (2012). Fraser (2016) builds on Marx's view that the crux of the capitalist system is the exploitative relation between classes, putting exploitation on a continuum with expropriation in an attempt to illustrate contemporary raced and classed domination. Mills (2004: 47) examines raced exploitation and discusses 'cultural exploitation': where 'some important cultural innovation or breakthrough' is represented as 'owing to' white people when it 'really comes from' people of colour.' Discussing the role of economic exploitation in systemic white supremacy he cites the classic line that 'white American wealth historically rests on red land and black labour' (Mills 2003: 12). Of course, these theorists could all be misguided – I only highlight the rich historical and contemporary strand of thought we give up by following Anderson's redefinition of exploitation to exclude any idea of productive contributions.

There is ample evidence for such an interpretation. For example, recall Young's argument that exploitative relations are enacted by 'social rules about what work is, who does what for whom, how work is compensated, and the social processes by which the results of work are appropriated.'<sup>395</sup> Here, she recognises that the processes through which we attribute productive output to specific agents are ethico-political ones, and she suggests that exploitation be understood as a relationship constituted by unfair labour, wage, and distributive practices. What's more, she explicitly criticises other analyses of exploitation for reducing 'institutional relations and structural relations' to mere monetary transfers or wealth levels.<sup>396</sup>

Therefore, though Young discusses exploitation 'in terms of productive contributions', her deeper theorisation of it relies on an analysis of a certain set of inequalitarian social norms – norms about how we value and reward social activities, and how we individuate their outputs – and the social practices and relations which accompany these norms. On my interpretation, an analysis of the exploitative wage/labour/distributive relations that define and enact exploitative transfers therefore underlies Young's discussion of the unfair transfer of productive contributions.<sup>397</sup> (In contrast, the set of social practices Anderson bases her new conception of exploitation on – fraud, breach of contract, coercive imposition of contracts, etc. – exclude mention of wages, labour time, productive output, and distributions.<sup>398</sup>)

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<sup>395</sup> Young (2011a: 50).

<sup>396</sup> Young (2011a: 53).

<sup>397</sup> In interpreting Young thus, I agree with Elster (1982 :364) that the concept of exploitation has both causal and normative aspects and that 'exploitation is a theoretical rather than a primitive concept, so that for any given theory of distributive justice, we can define a notion of exploitation to go with it.'

<sup>398</sup> This suggests Anderson thinks it impossible to analyse wage, labour, and distributions in relational/practice-based terms. I argue against this in Chapter 8, Section 4.

In sum, then, and contra Anderson, a political conception of agent responsibility can still play a role in egalitarian theorising – despite the fact that responsibility attributions cannot serve as an *apolitical foundation* of our theories of justice. The concept captures many complex political judgements and distils them into deceptively simple statements; as long as we are aware of its potential traps, we need not eschew it altogether. Nonetheless, as argued, to avoid unintentionally reproducing inequalitarian responsibility ascriptions we must inform our use of this concept with some critical awareness of the mechanisms of structural injustice. To animate a critical, egalitarian ‘good-sense’ political schema we are forced to move far beyond a narrow focus on choice and agent responsibility as the primary motors of distributive justice.

Accordingly, I now leave the theoretical current of responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism in search of approaches better equipped to understand and challenge structural injustices of race, gender, and class. The remainder of this chapter (and the thesis) focuses on alternative ways to conceptualise and integrate economic-distributive issues into egalitarianism, and on why doing so matters. I begin by suggesting that one of the most promising alternatives to responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism – relational egalitarianism – does not always manage to theorise the role and political significance of economic distributions clearly enough.

### **6.3. Relational Egalitarianism and Distributions**

Relational egalitarianism is a conception of social justice that aims to end oppression and to create a community in which people stand in relations of equality.<sup>399</sup> Relational egalitarians think social justice is instantiated if society’s ‘basic social and political institutions enable individuals equally, and adequately, to avoid relations such as domination and marginalisation, and discourage the emergence of

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<sup>399</sup> The classic statement of this position is Anderson (1999). See also Scheffler (2003); Schemmel (2011); Elford (2017).

objectionable status hierarchies.’<sup>400</sup>

Relational egalitarianism explicitly aims to re-attach egalitarian theory to egalitarian political movements and struggles; it unabashedly advocates keeping the ‘distinctively political aims of egalitarianism’ in sight.<sup>401</sup> Against the uncritical adoptions of right-wing conceptions of choice and responsibility that characterise much responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism, relational views challenge the idea that ‘individual choice’ ought to be central to justice.<sup>402</sup>

They also turn away from the political ontology of atomised individualism. Take, for example, one of the most influential articulations of relational egalitarianism – Elizabeth Anderson’s. Discussing unpaid carework, Anderson ‘rejects the atomistic norm of individual self-sufficiency as based on a failure to recognise the dependency of wage earners on the work of those whose labour is not for sale.’<sup>403</sup> She insists that egalitarians look at the relationships within which goods are distributed, not only at the distribution of goods themselves.<sup>404</sup> In these ways Anderson provides a welcome, inspiring, and rich alternative to currents of egalitarian thought dominated by the concept of choice. Her relational egalitarianism looks a promising framework from which to articulate and argue for a more egalitarian political schema.

Furthermore, relational egalitarianism’s theoretical approach tallies with many more specialised analyses of raced, gendered, and classed injustices. For example, Chen understands race as a ‘*relation of domination*’;<sup>405</sup> Bonilla-Silva understands society’s racial structure as ‘the totality of the *social relations and practices* that reinforce white

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<sup>400</sup> Schemmel (2011: 366). Cf. Elford (2017), who employs a less negativistic conception of relational egalitarianism (though I do not believe this difference to affect my arguments).

<sup>401</sup> Anderson (1999: 288).

<sup>402</sup> E.g. Anderson (1999: 308-309); Scheffler (2003: 31).

<sup>403</sup> Anderson (1999: 324).

<sup>404</sup> Anderson (1999: 314).

<sup>405</sup> Chen (2013), my emphasis.

privilege’;<sup>406</sup> Haslanger discusses the ‘*pattern of social relations* that constitute the social classes of men as dominant and women as subordinate’;<sup>407</sup> and Marxists, too, commonly understand class in relational terms.<sup>408</sup> The relational paradigm therefore looks a promising overarching framework from which to unite concerns about these kinds of injustices.

### ***6.3.1. The Ambiguous Role of Distributions Within Relational Egalitarianism***

Anderson insists that her egalitarianism is ‘sensitive to the need to integrate the demands of equal recognition with those of equal distribution.’<sup>409</sup> However, the place and significance of distributions and distributive justice within Anderson’s egalitarianism has not always been clear, nor entirely convincing. I will argue that we can trace this ambiguity (which I identify predominantly in Anderson’s early work<sup>410</sup>) back to one central question: how to understand the relationship between economic distributions and hierarchies of socio-political status? Our answer to this importantly affects how traditional egalitarian concerns about distributive inequalities are either integrated into or excluded from relational egalitarianism.

In earlier pieces, Anderson seems committed to a ‘sufficiency’ conception of distributive justice: she suggests that distributive inequalities above a certain ‘sufficient’ level do not trouble relational egalitarianism. She argues that people need effective access to *enough* resources to function as equal human beings, equal participants in a system of cooperative production, and equal citizens of a democratic state.<sup>411</sup> Inequalities above this threshold are deemed unthreatening to equal relations.

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<sup>406</sup> Bonilla-Silva (2017: 9), my emphasis.

<sup>407</sup> Haslanger (2012d: 228), my emphasis. See also Allen (2015: 514).

<sup>408</sup> See Wright (1980: 325-326) for discussion.

<sup>409</sup> Anderson (1999: 314).

<sup>410</sup> I identify some shifts in Anderson’s arguments after 2008, coinciding with the aftermath of the economic recession. I discuss the changes identifiable in her post-2008 work in footnotes below.

<sup>411</sup> Anderson (1999: 317-318).

Worryingly, Anderson's view of what distributive shares count as 'enough' is at times 'decidedly unambitious', as Christian Schemmel puts it<sup>412</sup> Schemmel points out that Anderson's view of how much distributive equality is required to achieve equal relations seems fairly conservative. For example, on Anderson's view, most people will achieve a sufficient distributive share through a wage earned by 'filling some role in the division of labour' (as long as they are capable of working).<sup>413</sup> But if we were imagining some pretty profound changes might be required to the mechanisms of wage setting and valuing labour, Anderson does not comply; rather, her suggestions are limited to minimum wage laws.<sup>414</sup>

Elsewhere, she goes slightly further, arguing for universal health care, 'a modest increase in the [US] minimum wage, and a more generous Earned Income Tax Credit', as well as paid dependent-care leave, as provided by many European states.<sup>415</sup> The UK minimum wage is modestly bigger than the US one<sup>416</sup>, we have a system of free health care<sup>417</sup>, and parents are entitled to paid dependent-care leave (or, failing that, to other social benefits<sup>418</sup>). This makes the UK a decent test case for Anderson's package of policy proposals.

Now, measured by income distribution, the UK is the fourth most unequal country in Europe. Anderson may be unconcerned by this since she at one point suggests that she views the accumulation of 'vast fortunes' as unproblematic as long as they

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<sup>412</sup> Schemmel (2011: 369).

<sup>413</sup> Anderson (1999: 321).

<sup>414</sup> Anderson (1999: 325). Cf. Anderson (2018) where she talks (for the first time, I believe) about the need to explore sharing economic rents more equitably rather than retaining focus on channelling income through waged work.

<sup>415</sup> Anderson (2004b: 253).

<sup>416</sup> OECD (2017).

<sup>417</sup> Albeit a chronically underfunded one, increasingly limited to EU citizens only (Citizen's Advice 2019a).

<sup>418</sup> Citizen's Advice (2019b).

are accompanied by generous social insurance programmes.<sup>419</sup> But she will certainly be concerned by the fact that the UK's class, gender, and race hierarchies are flourishing.<sup>420</sup> Because of this, Anderson's extended distributive policy proposals do little to reassure those of us worried that relational egalitarianism requires more decisive economic-distributive reforms. The case of the UK suggests Schemmel is right to argue that early Anderson's sufficiency conception of distributive justice 'cannot satisfy the requirements of relational equality.'<sup>421</sup>

Furthermore, as Anderson makes access to the resources needed for equal functioning conditional on undertaking 'responsible work' (if the person in question is capable of work) she must make some cut between productive/reproductive labour and unproductive leisure.<sup>422</sup> Her comments about the possible need for 'subsidies' for unpaid carework suggest she knows she cannot simply rely on conventional marketized valuations to make this cut.<sup>423</sup> But she seems happy to rely on markets for valuing all other forms of labour.<sup>424</sup>

Part of the problem stems from some residual naturalisation within Anderson's understanding of the economic sphere; she takes certain economic practices and

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<sup>419</sup> Equality Trust (2018); Anderson (2008: 256, including footnote 31); cf. Anderson (2019) where she sounds a markedly different tone.

<sup>420</sup> See Dorling (2015) on class; the gender pay gap among all UK employees is 17.9% (Office for National Statistics 2018); there is an 'ethnicity pay gap' of 19% between white and black men in the UK (Henehan & Rose 2018). Hate crimes are increasing in England and Wales (Crime Survey for England and Wales 2018). Gendered and raced discrimination continues in education, politics, and in the workplace (e.g. Gillborn 2008; Shabi 2019; Adams *et al.* 2016). Issues of classed hatred and discrimination also remain (Chambre 2017; Jones 2016; Tyler 2008). For more on the position of women and people of colour in the UK see Chapter 2, Section 3.

<sup>421</sup> Schemmel (2011: 370). I am not here arguing against the possibility of *any* adequate relational egalitarian distributive sufficientarianism; rather, I argue that Anderson's position on what counts as sufficient distributive reforms to secure equal political relations is too conservative.

<sup>422</sup> Anderson (1999: 312, 321).

<sup>423</sup> Anderson (1999: 328).

<sup>424</sup> Anderson (2008) argues that we should let markets set the price of labour and then, if the resultant distributive outcomes jeopardise equal social relationships, constrain the *range* of these outcomes.



understandings for granted, treating them as pre-political givens. This naturalisation is most evident in her discussion of low-wage workers. Here, she writes that relational egalitarianism ‘focuses on appreciation for the roles that low-wage workers fill’.<sup>425</sup> Yet she here accepts the association of low wages with low productivity; such appreciation is warranted, apparently, because low-wage tasks (which she also here equates with ‘low-*skill* tasks’ without further comment) free others up for ‘more productive’ work.<sup>426</sup>

Such an approach de-couples the socio-political status of low-wage work (in Anderson’s terms, the social ‘appreciation’ it warrants) from the wage it commands and accepts that low wages reflect low skill and productivity. Here we might use Anderson’s own arguments against her: surely people must regard ‘every product of the economy as jointly produced by everyone working together’?<sup>427</sup> In the article in question she does not explain how we can sensibly talk about low productivity roles and high productivity roles given her assumption of joint production. Furthermore, my arguments in Chapters 3-5 suggest the fundamental importance of politicising the notion of ‘productivity’ rather than accepting it at face value as a pre-given, objective and politically neutral calculation.

Relatedly, Anderson never explains how real social ‘appreciation’ can manifest while such workers remain paid less than everyone else. Surely the obvious way to express the social importance of and appreciation for certain labours is to reward them with a decent wage? As my argument in Chapters 4 and 5 suggest, recognition of certain work activities as agent responsible for productive output is, in part, a matter of normative judgements about what causal inputs *matter* in generating what

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<sup>425</sup> Anderson (1999: 326). Cf. Anderson (2019: 138) where, discussing abuses of power in the workplace, she acknowledges that ‘the amount of respect, standing, and autonomy they get is roughly proportional to their market value.’

<sup>426</sup> Anderson (1999: 326). These comments are made stranger by Anderson’s reluctance to make claims about productive outputs elsewhere (e.g. 1999: 321; 2010: 13).

<sup>427</sup> Anderson (1999: 321).

outcomes. If low paid jobs matter as much as Anderson suggests they do, why accept at face value the assumption that markets correctly individuate and value their productivity?<sup>428</sup>

Elsewhere, Anderson outlines some answers to this question, writing that differing market pay levels are justified because: first, markets are efficient epistemic tools for helping us convert our partial individual knowledges and self-interest into outcomes that advance others' interests;<sup>429</sup> second, markets safeguard individual freedom;<sup>430</sup> third, and most relevant for current purposes, she argues that wage differentials 'apply only at the enterprise level, not that of the basic structure.'<sup>431</sup> However, she does not explain what exactly the 'enterprise level' is, nor why it remains separate from the basic structure; is it unclear whether it is supposed to coincide with what

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<sup>428</sup> Recently, Anderson (2019) seems to have recognised that socio-political status is closely connected to economic position at least in the sense that one's (classed) employment position importantly determines one's vulnerability to the despotic 'private government' of workplace relations. Anderson argues convincingly that 'public and academic discourse has largely lost sight of the problem that organized workers in the nineteenth century saw clearly: the pervasiveness of private government at work' (Anderson 2019: 62). However, her description of these despotic workplace relations as 'communist dictatorships' frustratingly presents a power relation at the core of capitalism – workers' need to earn a wage to survive, and the vulnerability this engenders – as, in fact, antithetical to capitalism, disavowing it to another socio-economic system altogether (Anderson, 2019: 39). Furthermore, a gap remains within the relational egalitarian corpus regarding the *other* problems organised workers in the nineteenth century – and beyond – saw: wage, ownership, and wealth levels, and their connection to classed social status, power, and domination. (Anderson's {2018} most recent, as yet unpublished work takes some steps towards redressing this gap.)

<sup>429</sup> Anderson (2008: 249). This argument ignores how market price can reflect many things apart from our individual pre-political interests – for example: first, the balance of power between workers and capital owners (including the role of trade unions), monopolies and monopsonies; second, the value accorded to that good only by that section of the population who purchases or may purchase it; and third, what we are willing to pay for something need not represent how we value it in a broader, non-economic sense. On these issues, see Olsaretti (2009: 68–70).

<sup>430</sup> Anderson (2008: 249–253). Anderson's later work (2019) on abuses of power within the workplace is a helpful corrective to this claim; here, she shows that contemporary labour markets, far from securing the individual freedom of working-class people, cement their harmful domination by 'private governments' of capitalist firms.

<sup>431</sup> Anderson (2008: 253). For further discussion on separating 'the economy' from the rest of society see Chapters 7 and 8.

we might normally call ‘the economy’ or ‘the labour market’ or whether it is some new, narrower term.

Underlying these answers to the question of why, if low paid jobs matter so much, we should accept marketized equations of low wages with low productivity, is early Anderson’s view that there is no alternative to a capitalist market economy.<sup>432</sup> After all, if capitalist markets are the only way to arrange the ‘enterprise level’, then Anderson’s preference for focusing on ‘anti-materialist and non-materialist grounds for esteem’ in order to undermine discriminatory class snobberies and classed hierarchies of esteem makes sense.<sup>433</sup>

These attempts to separate economic distributions from issues of political power and social hierarchies are mainly but not entirely confined to Anderson’s earlier work. For example, her argument that we strip the concept of exploitation of any distributive content comes in a later book (one which otherwise offers a more integrated account of the role of economic distributions in US racial inequality).<sup>434</sup> Here, again, she suggests that a focus on distributive issues is misplaced or unnecessary.

Especially in earlier pieces Anderson often starts or ends her discussion of economic distributions by stating something like the following: ‘Egalitarians support distributive constraints that prevent the conversion of wealth inequality into an

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<sup>432</sup> Anderson (2004a: 359): ‘in the post-Cold War era (if it was not already obvious decades before), capitalism is the only viable form of economic organisation’; in a 2008 symposium Anderson labels socialism and anarchism ‘dead ends’ (quoted in Finlayson {2015: 18}). Contrast this with her remarks in the Q&A of a recent lecture in which she states that ‘TINA’ – ‘there is no alternative’ – operates to shut down political imaginaries of different possible worlds (Anderson 2018). I draw attention to this change because it is another important reason to, first, distinguish early Anderson’s position on economic-distributive issues from later (especially 2018-2019) Anderson’s position, and second, to interrogate her earlier position in light of the classic status of these early works.

<sup>433</sup> Anderson (2008: 266).

<sup>434</sup> Anderson (2010: 13).

unjust social hierarchy, and ensure that everyone... has enough to stand in relations of equality to others.’<sup>435</sup> But, by unlinking social appreciation – and therefore social status – from wage levels, by separating the ‘enterprise level’ from the basic structure of society, and by stripping the concept of exploitation of any connection to political-economic (re)productivity and wage levels, Anderson assumes certain answers to the question of how separable economic-distributive issues are from unjust social hierarchies. For the reasons outlined, her answers are not immediately persuasive.<sup>436</sup>

In contrast to Anderson, Schemmel – also a relational egalitarian – argues that to truly relate to one another as equal participants in reciprocal cooperation, we must limit inequalities in the goods produced by such cooperation. This gives relational egalitarians an ‘intrinsic reason for limiting distributive inequality: that it expresses respect for people’s equal status in the overall relationship of social cooperation.’<sup>437</sup> Schemmel therefore suggests relational egalitarians endorse a *defeasible presumption of distributive equality* so that those relationships governing the production and distribution of goods express equal respect for all participants.

Schemmel’s argument is compelling, and it allows us to explain the importance of economic-distributive equality from within the relational paradigm since it focuses on the relationships that govern the production and distribution of goods. Unlike Anderson, he implicitly assumes such relationships must form part of the basic structure; there is no appeal to a separate ‘enterprise level’ here.

Yet a puzzle remains in Schemmel’s view of the relationship between social status

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<sup>435</sup> Anderson (2008: 263). See also Anderson (2008: 267; 1999, 326).

<sup>436</sup> Chapters 7 and 8 provide an in-depth argument for a different answer to this question.

<sup>437</sup> Schemmel (2011: 374). He writes that ‘exactly how much distributive equality relational egalitarianism requires on intrinsic grounds may remain an open question’ (Schemmel 2011, 375).

and economic distributions. Take his discussion of a case in which justice-relevant reasons necessitate permitting distributive inequalities, but where these inequalities risk engendering unequal status norms; specifically, he explores a case where children's social status is linked to the wearing of brand name clothes. Schemmel suggests the problem is 'not inequality in income and wealth, but a... spirit of "possessive individualism" which connects status too closely to possession of material goods.'<sup>438</sup> Because of this, attempts can be made to challenge such norms and to encourage 'the formation of a plurality of different social groups with divergent standards for assigning status.'<sup>439</sup>

Such a solution assumes distributions can be unlinked from social status with the right 'sociopsychological strategy.' But this seems at odds with Schemmel's claim that there is a defeasible presumption of distributive equality *intrinsic* to relational egalitarianism. If we can transform status-goods into non-status-goods with the right sociopsychological intervention, where does that leave relational egalitarians' intrinsic reason for limiting distributive inequality? Why not focus on transforming all goods into non-status goods and adopt Anderson's conservative distributive proposals?

This puzzle again has roots in the problem of determining the exact relationship of economic distributions to socio-political status and power. Do economic distributions, by materially/distributively instantiating the 'overall relationship of social cooperation', *themselves* express equal or unequal social relations?<sup>440</sup> If so, distributions engendering problematic status hierarchies seem intrinsically at odds with relational egalitarianism; Schemmel's presumption of distributive equality stands, and his school example fails. Or can problematic social hierarchies be

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<sup>438</sup> Schemmel (2011: 384).

<sup>439</sup> Schemmel (2011: 384).

<sup>440</sup> Schemmel (2011: 374).

eliminated through non-distributive sociopsychological interventions and far less demanding distributive changes since minimum wage laws and a basic social security net are enough to secure relations of equality? If so, then Schemmel's argument for a defeasible presumption of distributive equality *intrinsic* to relational egalitarianism does not get off the ground.

Perhaps Schemmel thinks socio-political hierarchies are more or less tightly linked to distributive outcomes depending on context; at one point he writes that 'status norms and their relation to distributions vary across societies; detailed empirical research is needed in order to answer the questions' of when distributive inequality gives rise to unacceptable status differences and when distributive change is the correct remedy for these differences.<sup>441</sup> There is surely much truth to this. Yet since his paper is arguing for a particular view about the importance of equal distributions for relations of equality, it is confusing to see him suggest that this matter is in fact an empirical one.<sup>442</sup>

This turn to empirical context also raises the question of the socio-historical roots of the 'possessive individualism' Schemmel discusses. Possessive individualism is not simply a free-floating psychological orientation to the world; rather, it is an ideological orientation to and understanding of the world engendered by a particular socio-economic context (amongst other things).<sup>443</sup> As Beverley Skeggs argues, 'property and personhood have long been closely connected' through the liberal idea of the possessive individual, and this idea has been '*institutionalised* into

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<sup>441</sup> Schemmel (2011: 383).

<sup>442</sup> I here assume that social status is part and parcel of relative social standing and therefore an important constituent part of equal/unequal social relations. Perhaps Schemmel understands social status differently – this might explain away some of my confusion on this point – but he does not say.

<sup>443</sup> Macpherson coined the term, exploring how the emergence of a 'market society' in the 17<sup>th</sup> century birthed a conception of the subject defined through his capacity to work for a wage and his supposed self-possession and self-reliance: 'the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them' (1964: 3).

the English social contract and transported around the world.’<sup>444</sup> Self-understandings do not pre-exist their wider social contexts and in the case of possessive individualism, systems of economic exchange and distribution are central to their reproduction.<sup>445</sup> To try to change the self-understanding without changing the distributive/economic institutions that help form and reproduce it would therefore face problems.

These puzzles in the writings of Anderson and Schemmel suggest that there is room for further work investigating the relationship between economic distributions and socio-political status hierarchies.<sup>446</sup> To end this chapter, I argue that these relational egalitarian discussions are implicitly framed by assumptions that can be traced back to the work of Nancy Fraser. Therefore, I suggest we would do well to look to Fraser to help us think through how to conceive of the relationship between economic distributions, hierarchical social status, and political power.

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<sup>444</sup> Skeggs (2019: 32).

<sup>445</sup> See also Skeggs (2003: 19–20).

<sup>446</sup> I interpret Martin O’Neill’s work as sitting within the broad relational egalitarian family of views. O’Neill’s development of the Rawlsian idea of a ‘property-owning democracy’ also challenges many of Anderson’s missteps, though less directly than Schemmel (2011). O’Neill treats the economy as a key part of the basic structure and accordingly argues that to treat people as equals requires structural economic transformations that go far beyond European welfare state-style reforms (O’Neill 2012: 93). He follows Rawls in assuming that significant economic inequalities are ‘often associated’ with inequalities of social status but, like Schemmel, he notes rather than explores this association (O’Neill 2012: 88). As in Schemmel’s work, this occasionally result in puzzles. For example, at one point O’Neill tells us we cannot ‘simply... assume that economic power and political power must always go together’ but in the next section he builds an argument for property-owning democracy around Rawls’ assertion that ‘we should care about [economic] inequality in part because of its effects with regard to status, power, domination, and self-respect’ (2012: 87). He clearly takes economic inequalities to have an important relationship to political power and status hierarchies, then, but leaves the nature of this relationship unexplored. Similarly, O’Neill’s work on ‘predistribution’ persuasively refocuses attention on the character of economic relationships (rather than distributive outcomes). But though he understands economic relationships as ‘sites for the exercise of power’ (O’Neill 2019: 88), he does not discuss why this is the case nor what forms of power – economic, political, social – are at play. A gap in the relational egalitarian cannon therefore remains to explore underlying issues regarding the political role and significance of economic distributions and relations.

### 6.3.2. *Looking to Nancy Fraser's Perspectival Dualism?*

In her first (and most influential) paper on relational egalitarianism, Anderson cites both Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth on the relational egalitarian imperative to 'integrate the demands of equal recognition with those of equal distribution.'<sup>447</sup> However, Fraser and Honneth disagree in important ways on how to conceptualise the relationship between distributive and recognitive justice. Honneth understands recognition as the fundamental category of social justice; for him, distributions are of only derivative importance. Thus, for Honneth, distributive demands are not to be integrated with, but rather deduced from, recognitive demands.

In contrast, Fraser denies that we can subsume distributive concerns within a recognitive framework. Instead she articulates a theory of 'perspectival dualism' designed to recognise the importance of both distributive and recognitive approaches, and to integrate their demands into one harmonious project.<sup>448</sup> Fraser's core aim is that this project delivers 'parity of participation': distributive and recognitive transformations which 'permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers.'<sup>449</sup> She clearly imagines participatory parity along egalitarian lines, writing that 'participatory parity simply is the meaning of equal respect for the equal autonomy of human beings qua social actors' and 'entails the real freedom to participate on a par with others in social life.'<sup>450</sup> Fraser's desire to integrate the demands of recognition and redistribution into one project aiming to secure equal participation and interaction therefore sounds far closer to Anderson's project than Honneth's does.<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> Anderson (1999: 314).

<sup>448</sup> Fraser and Honneth (2003).

<sup>449</sup> Fraser (2003: 36).

<sup>450</sup> Fraser (2003: 231).

<sup>451</sup> It is a question of closeness since important theoretical and political differences between Anderson and Fraser remain. Though Fraser's 'participatory parity' and Anderson's relational equality have similarities, their consequences are developed quite differently at points by the two theorists. For example, Fraser has always been more interested in socialist root-and-branch



Furthermore, Anderson's view of the importance (or lack thereof) of distributions for equal social relationships appears to mirror one of the central contentions of Fraser's work on this issue. This is that economic inequalities are 'relatively autonomous' and 'partially uncoupled' from status hierarchies in contemporary capitalist societies.<sup>452</sup> This relative uncoupling would explain why social appreciation may not always match waged rewards, yet the remaining possibility of their connection might explain Anderson's claim that greater appreciation for low-waged work might still 'squeeze the gap between the highest- and lowest-paid workers.'<sup>453</sup>

Fraser's work therefore offers a promising (and vast) resource for those of us attracted to the relational egalitarian paradigm but unsure of the place of distributive justice within it.<sup>454</sup> Fraser assumes a far less individualist, more 'structural' analysis of economic inequality than the responsibility-sensitive egalitarian literature tends to do.<sup>455</sup> Relatedly, rather than discussing market mechanisms in the abstract, she tends to reconnect current market workings and outcomes to their capitalist context and form. In these ways, she fits well with the concerns raised in the first half of the thesis.<sup>456</sup>

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transformation of the economy (e.g. Fraser 1995), whereas Anderson – at least until very recently – has been more interested in economic 'range constraints' to keep capitalist inequality within what she regards as safe bounds (e.g. Anderson 2008). Since I regard this aspect of Anderson's approach questionable, it provides another reason to look to Fraser.

<sup>452</sup> Fraser (2003: 21-24, 35).

<sup>453</sup> Anderson (1999: 326). I am not claiming perspectival dualism can be unambiguously categorised as a relational egalitarian view; only that Anderson's own understanding of distributive issues, and their place within relational egalitarianism, seems influenced by perspectival dualism – particularly in its part-separation of distributive and recognitive issues. Further work would be needed to fully integrate perspectival dualism into relational egalitarianism, but as I think perspectival dualism mistaken in some ways, I do not attempt this. In understanding participatory parity as an aim somewhat similar to equal social relations, I run counter to Elford (2012); he understands Fraser's ideal of *recognitive* justice to roughly map onto relational egalitarianism's ideal of equal social standing.

<sup>454</sup> E.g. Fraser (1995; 1997; 1998; 2000; 2003; 2004).

<sup>455</sup> E.g. Fraser (1995).

<sup>456</sup> E.g. Fraser (1995). See Chapter 5, Section 2.4.

Finally, some parts of Fraser's work suggest that she can help us rethink the place of distributive justice within the relational egalitarian paradigm. If early Anderson pays lip service to the imperative to 'integrate the demands of equal recognition with those of equal distribution', she nonetheless focuses far more on the former – to the detriment of her theorisation of the latter. In contrast, Fraser asserts that social movements which 'ignore or truncate the distributive dimension are likely to exacerbate economic injustice, however otherwise progressive their aims.'<sup>457</sup> Her more uncompromising line on these matters suggests that her work might help overcome the worries raised above about Anderson's handling of distributive matters.

Accordingly, the next chapter is devoted to analysing Fraser's arguments about how economic distributions relate to socio-political status hierarchies. There, I argue that though we can learn a huge amount from Fraser's approach, egalitarians should not follow her conception of the relationship of wealth and income to status and power. Instead, I suggest that distributions and recognition importantly co-constitute one another, and I then explore the consequences of this view for how we understand the economic distributions and their political significance.

## **6.4. Conclusion: Motivating a Closer Look at the Political**

### **Significance of Economic Distributions**

Approaches which use choice as the primary theoretical tool with which to develop theories of distributive justice, then, are non-starters. To challenge some of the most serious inequalities we face, we need far more strings to our bow. In particular, some working knowledge of the mechanisms of structural injustice is invaluable. If we move away from responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism, where should we look for

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<sup>457</sup> Fraser (2003: 87).

theoretical resources to allow us to discuss the role and significance (or lack thereof) of distributive concerns for structural injustices? The primary alternative to responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism – relational egalitarianism – has much to recommend it. But puzzles remain about its theorisation of the role and political significance of economic distributions.

Granted, responsibility-sensitive egalitarians too often attempt to solve the riddles of distributive equality by assuming they can abstract away recognitive issues – issues of racist ‘prejudice’ for example. But, in reaction, Anderson’s relational egalitarianism swings too far the other way, stripping the concept of exploitation of any distributive angle, decoupling wage levels from ‘social appreciation’, and proposing a surprisingly limited package of redistributive proposals. Even Schemmel, who argues convincingly that greater distributive equality is needed to secure equal social relations, is not always clear about how exactly socio-political status and power relate to economic distributions. Further work on this topic therefore looks worthwhile.

There are signs that Anderson’s framing of this problem was informed by, and tallied with, some of the key claims in Nancy Fraser’s work on economic redistribution and cultural recognition. Because of this, I next turn to Fraser to explore how economic distributions relate to issues of cultural recognition and socio-political status. In Chapter 7, I focus on perspectival dualism’s conception of distributive justice. Chapter 8 presents a ‘non-dualist’ alternative conception of distributive justice: one that does not separate cultural recognition from economic distributions, and then assesses how this conception could inform a different relational egalitarian approach to issues of distributive justice.

## 7. AGAINST ECONOMY-CULTURE DUALISM: PERSPECTIVAL DUALISM AND THE CASE OF RACED ECONOMIES

### 7.1. Introduction

*Everyone talks about the need for diversity and yet nobody seems to worry about poor white boys. We need to stop obsessing with particular minorities –*

*Liam Fox, Conservative MP<sup>458</sup>*

*[A]s we've tried to deal with some of the issues around race and women's agendas, around tackling some of the discrimination that's there, it has actually had a negative impact on the food chain [for] white working boys. –*

*Angela Rayner, MP & Labour Shadow Education Secretary<sup>459</sup>*

As we process recent political events, one narrative has become commonplace. This holds that a 'cultural politics of identity' has long overshadowed class and the economy, and, via Brexit and Trump, the working class wreaked revenge for being so ignored.<sup>460</sup> Pitting class against identity like this is not new.<sup>461</sup> Facing this latest

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<sup>458</sup> Fox (2016).

<sup>459</sup> As quoted in Maidment (2018). See also Stephen Kinnock's similar remarks (Simons 2016).

<sup>460</sup> E.g. G. Fraser (2016); Jenkins (2016). Goodhart (2016) similarly talks of Brexit as a classed 'peasants' revolt' of the 'left behind.' These explanations whiten the working class and ignore the driving role of white elites and middle classes (Virdee and McGeever 2017: 2; Bhambra 2017). They majority of Trump voters were middle class, though white working class voters then tipped the scales in Trump's favour (Lamont *et al.* 2017: 154). Similarly, 'Leave voters among the elite and middle classes were crucial to the final outcome, with almost three in five votes coming

upswell, feminists and anti-racists have again denied that their politics must take a step back to regain supposed balance.

Identity politics is ‘the anti-hero with a thousand faces’ and I certainly do not defend everything ascribed to this loose category.<sup>462</sup> Following Suzanna Danuta Walters’ claim that ‘identity politics is where intersectionality lives’, I defend what I see as the best of identity politics: intersectional ideas on how forms of oppression, and the ‘structural identities’ arising from them, operate as interwoven and mutually mediating categories.<sup>463</sup>

For those of us interested in Walter’s intersectional project, left critiques of identity weigh heavier than centrist calls for ‘post-identity liberalism’ – calls which neither re-centre class nor confront raced or gendered oppression.<sup>464</sup> The core of left critiques is often the accusation that identity politics directs attention towards superstructural cultural issues which leave economic structures intact.<sup>465</sup> Such charges are underpinned by a dualism that sees economy and culture as mutually exclusive categories, and economy as more ‘real’, ‘material’, or ‘objective’ than culture.

Economy-culture dualism remains common-sense in political philosophy, theory, and public discourse.<sup>466</sup> And, though many key intersectional theorists investigate class, economy-culture dualism likely contributes to how class sometimes sits

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from those in social classes A, B and C1’ (Virdee and McGeever 2017: 2) – however, this picture is complicated by the fact that the ‘NRS’ system of categorising social class (the A/B/C1/C2/D/E categories) puts 55% of the UK population in these top three classes (Butcher 2019).

<sup>461</sup> E.g. Rorty (1998).

<sup>462</sup> Bickford (1997: 112) quoting Geertz.

<sup>463</sup> Walters (2018: 482); Cooper (2016: 390).

<sup>464</sup> E.g. Lilla (2018).

<sup>465</sup> E.g. Dean (2016b) - I discuss Jodi Dean’s work in Chapter 8. Heyes (2002) likewise characterises this as the crux of left-critiques of identity politics.

<sup>466</sup> For discussion see Robeyns (2003); Ives (2005).

uneasily apart from listings of race, gender, sexuality, 'etc.'<sup>467</sup> Walby *et al.* diagnose 'ambivalence as to the location of class' in intersectional analyses and think the intersection of gender and class 'relatively neglected in current debates'.<sup>468</sup> While noting that none of race, class, or gender are 'obviously analogous', Heyes states, 'class in particular has a distinctively different political history.'<sup>469</sup> Yet all agree that class must be part of intersectional analyses.

Given this, and given current restagings of the identity versus class debate, it is worth looking at economy-culture dualism as key in reproducing these arguments every decade or so. I argue that to move beyond this debate – and to best theorise the intersections of class with race, gender, and sexuality – we must abandon economy-culture dualism.

Yet how to examine a position often implicitly assumed rather than argued for? Here, Nancy Fraser's work on how to understand and integrate left economic-redistributive projects with feminist and anti-racist cultural 'recognitive' projects is an invaluable source. Her 'perspectival dualism' is the best – most plausible, fully articulated, and influential – form of economy-culture dualism around.<sup>470</sup> Perspectival dualism understands economic distributions and cultural recognition as two different dimensions of, and perspectives on justice – both of which are important and neither of which is reducible to the other.

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<sup>467</sup> E.g. Carby (1982); Collins (2000); Combahee River Collective (2005).

<sup>468</sup> Walby *et al.* (2012: 231).

<sup>469</sup> Heyes (2002). Better reasons for the relative de-emphasis of class compared to gender and race lie in intersectionality's origins in black feminist thought (Cooper 2016).

<sup>470</sup> Fraser's recognition/redistribution paradigm looms indicatively large in topic introductions by Markell (2018) and Squires (2008). Walters (2018: 481) borrows terms from Fraser when she calls identity versus class as 'a battle between a politics of recognition and a politics of redistribution.' Fraser's framework structures studies ranging from the welfare state (Dahl 2004), and disability (Dodd 2016), to social work (Boone *et al.* 2018), and education (Öchsner & Murray 2018).

Arising from a late-1990s schism between the ‘cultural left’ and the ‘social left’, perspectival dualism is explicitly designed to heal identity versus class schisms by retaining focus on economic injustices without indulging sexist, racist, heteronormative backlash. I argue that perspectival dualism struggles to illuminate the intersection of race and class, and that better analyses do not pit the importance of economy and culture against one another, nor view the economy as an a-cultural, value-free zone.

Then, in Chapter 8, I turn to Jodi Dean’s contemporary left restaging of identity versus class debates, arguing that Dean’s implicit economy-culture dualism repeats some of Fraser’s mistakes. Building on the lessons of Fraser and Dean, I outline an anti-dualist approach which understands the economy as a harmful theoretical objectification of certain practices and resources – an objectification which shores up and naturalises raced, classed, and gendered relations of domination. I then suggest how we might build a better, counter-hegemonic understanding of the economy.

I start this chapter with an outline of perspectival dualism and then discuss three important sources of ambiguity within the theory. I argue that even on the most charitable understanding, perspectival dualism struggles to capture some important lessons from black feminist thought about the intersectionality of different injustices. But the features that make it hard for the theory to capture these lessons are also the features that keep it distinct from what Fraser calls ‘deconstructive anti-dualism’- a position which understands economy and culture as importantly co-constitutive. Therefore, I argue, we should give up economy-culture dualism and embrace anti-dualism.

This argument has implications for how we might best incorporate economic-distributive concerns into relational egalitarianism. Recall, from Chapter 6, that the role and political significance of economic distributions is not always clear in

relational egalitarian thought. While Anderson and Schemmel agree that economic distributions matter insofar as they affect equal relations and equal social status, they disagree about the degree to which distributions did so affect relations and status. At points Anderson wholly or partly decouples structures of social recognition from structures of economic distribution. Even Schemmel, arguing for a more ambitious relational egalitarian program of economic-distributive reform, is not always clear about how exactly socio-political status hierarchies relate to economic-distributive structures.

We can learn much about this topic from exploring Fraser's clear and well-developed position on it. However, I ultimately argue that we should not adopt Fraser's understanding of economic-distributive justice nor her view on how the economic-distributive and cultural-recognitive elements of justice relate to one another. Building on this chapter's arguments for moving away from Fraser's perspectival dualism, I develop an alternative proposal in Chapter 8.

The next two chapters focus on the intersections of race and class because I believe this topic, and work on it by critical race theorists, deserve wider attention. Similar conclusions could be reached by centring class and gender, however.

## **7.2. Perspectival Dualism**

As Walters suggests, the academic version of the 'class backlash' electoral explanation discussed above invokes 'a battle between a politics of recognition and a politics of redistribution.'<sup>471</sup> Both Walters and Fraser think this a false binary, since all political mobilisations call for both recognition and redistribution.<sup>472</sup> Fraser aims to overcome this framing of recognition and redistribution as 'either/or' competitors,

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<sup>471</sup> Fraser (1995); Walters (2018: 481).

<sup>472</sup> It is unclear whether Walters follows Fraser any further, though I suspect not given that she frames her approach from within an intersectional paradigm rather than a dualist one.



and to restore an emphasis on class politics without sidelining the ‘politics of recognition’. I agree: we must resist any simplistic, antagonistic binary of class and ‘identity politics’.

### 7.2.1. *Overview*

For Fraser, the politics of redistribution maps on to ‘the economic’, and the politics of recognition onto ‘the cultural’. She insists we theorise traditional economic injustices without erasing injustices of race, gender or sexuality, or giving reductively economistic accounts of them. But she insists the ‘politics of recognition’ is not enough either; we must not deny or overlook economic-distributive injustices.

Fraser offers perspectival dualism as the foundations of a huge project. She wants the theory to help us do three things.<sup>473</sup> First, to articulate an overarching conception of justice accommodating ‘defensible’ recognitive and redistributive claims. Second, to envision institutional arrangements to remedy both kinds of injustices, minimising ‘mutual interferences’ between remedies. Third, to understand the complex relations between economy and culture in contemporary society.

Perspectival dualism is offered, then, both as normative political philosophy – as a framework to help articulate a unified vision for the left – and as social theory – as an account of economy and culture and their relation.<sup>474</sup> Since perspectival dualism arises out of Fraser’s desire to avoid the extremes of anti-dualism and substantive dualism, examining why she views them as dangerous is instructive.

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<sup>473</sup> Fraser (2004: 455-456).

<sup>474</sup> This sits comfortably within Fraser’s (1989: 113) ‘critical social theoretic’ approach which ‘frames its research program and its conceptual framework with an eye to the aims and activities of those oppositional social movements with which it has a partisan, though not uncritical, identification’.

### *Fraser Against Deconstructive Anti-Dualism*

Fraser understands anti-dualism to view culture and economy as so mutually constitutive as to make meaningful separation impossible.<sup>475</sup> She associates it with Judith Butler and Iris Marion Young, and harbours two main concerns about it. First, she worries that if culture and economy cannot be meaningfully distinguished, then all injustices are necessarily both cultural and economic. Fraser argues that such an approach paints 'a night in which all cows are grey', eliding 'actually existing divergences of status from class' by seeing all class injustice as status injustice and vice versa.<sup>476</sup>

Second, Fraser thinks anti-dualists view capitalist society as 'so monolithically systematic that a struggle against one aspect of it necessarily threatens the whole.'<sup>477</sup> Her worry seems to be that if the economy is cultural and culture economic, we risk collapsing different systematic injustices into one well-oiled, neatly and necessarily unified system. For example, she argues that calling struggles against sexist social structures 'economic' risks collapsing any difference between patriarchy and capitalism. This collapsing of differences creates an 'overtotalized' view of society as a 'monolithic 'system' of interlocking oppressive structures.'<sup>478</sup>

Fraser thinks this overtotalized view politically paralysing and over-simplistic. Paralysing for implying that progress on one kind of injustice requires progress on all. And over-simplistic for assuming any blow to patriarchy, for example, will necessarily be a blow to capitalism and racism; she thinks anti-dualism makes synergising our fight against these systems look far too easy.<sup>479</sup> Thus, Fraser thinks

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<sup>475</sup> Fraser (2003: 60).

<sup>476</sup> Fraser (2003: 60–61).

<sup>477</sup> Fraser (1999: 51).

<sup>478</sup> Fraser (1998: 147).

<sup>479</sup> Fraser (1998: 146).

anti-dualism is to be avoided at all costs. But she also thinks substantive dualism a non-starter, and it is to her rejection of this alternative that I now turn.

### *Fraser Against Substantive Dualism*

Substantive dualists view economy and culture as substantively distinct ‘domains’, matching substantively distinct ‘spheres of justice.’<sup>480</sup> Redistribution and recognition are presented as mutually exclusive qualities of social relations; economic injustices arise from economic-distributive relations, and cultural injustices from relations of recognition.<sup>481</sup>

Fraser sees this ‘substantively separate spheres’ view as inadequate ‘both conceptually and politically’ (and I agree).<sup>482</sup> First, it inscribes contingent social categories that emerge historically from capitalism onto the world itself, helping naturalise them. Second, these domains are neither entirely separate nor rigidly bounded, even under capitalism; to paint them so reinforces the disassociation of the politics of recognition and redistribution that we are trying to undo. These realms are, in fact, ‘more or less permeable’ – the cultural realm is not *free* from economics, nor vice versa.<sup>483</sup>

Exactly how does Fraser view the economic as permeated by culture? She writes, ‘the economy is not a culture-free zone, but a culture-instrumentalizing and resignifying one.’<sup>484</sup> She suggests economic mechanisms often take cultural *inputs*, when those inputs are useful for capitalist interests – as with a gendered division of

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<sup>480</sup> Fraser (1999: 44; 2003: 61).

<sup>481</sup> Fraser (1999: 44). Though Fraser does not name any substantive dualists, Mitchell (1998) gives a wonderful genealogy of this modern understanding of the economy.

<sup>482</sup> Fraser (1999: 44).

<sup>483</sup> Fraser (1999: 44).

<sup>484</sup> Fraser (1999: 44).

labour or a particularly marketable part of culture, for example.<sup>485</sup> For Fraser, culture thus permeates the economic zone as inputs, but economic ‘mechanisms’ themselves remain a-cultural. In fact, she often emphasises that ‘in practice’ or ‘for practical purposes’, economic and cultural injustices are almost always ‘interimbricated so as to reinforce one another dialectically.’<sup>486</sup> Substantive dualism denies these complex, multiple overlappings. In this respect it is the antithesis of anti-dualism, which views economy and culture as always co-present and co-constitutive.

Talk of the ‘imbrication’ of two nonetheless fairly ‘autonomous’ social orders show Fraser navigating between these positions. For her, these social orders overlap in multiple complex ways yet remain ‘relatively autonomous’ and ‘partially uncoupled.’<sup>487</sup> Understanding how this partial uncoupling and autonomy sits with her acknowledgement that economic and cultural injustices almost always ‘reinforce one another dialectically’ is tricky. I ultimately argue she fails to walk this tightrope.

### *Perspectival Dualism*

Fraser presents perspectival dualism as a way out of this substantive dualism dead-end. It understands justice as requiring two different perspectives - economic-redistributive and cultural-recognitive. It sees virtually every injustice as, ‘for practical purposes’, two dimensional – as having both an economic and cultural dimension.

However, injustices are not assumed to have each ‘dimension’ equally. Rather, they sit somewhere along a spectrum. At one end sit ‘ideal-type’ purely economic injustices - working class exploitation as understood by ‘orthodox, economicist

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<sup>485</sup> Fraser (2003: 62).

<sup>486</sup> Fraser (1995: 72).

<sup>487</sup> Fraser (2003: 90).

Marxism' is Fraser's preferred example.<sup>488</sup> At the other end sit ideal-type purely cultural injustices – here her preferred example is injustices suffered by 'despised sexualities.'<sup>489</sup> In between lie injustices that are 'at root' economic or cultural to varying degrees. Injustices of gender and race sit somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, for example.

How are we to tell how big an economic or cultural dimension an injustice has? Fraser suggests ideal-type one-dimensional economic injustices are 'at core', 'ultimately', 'at bottom', 'rooted in' the economy.<sup>490</sup> For an injustice to sit towards the economic end of the spectrum, it must thus be at its 'core', predominantly rooted in the economic social order. It may have accompanying recognitive injustices, but these will be largely indirect, 'derivative' effects of redistributive injustice, rather than 'primary' or 'co-original.'<sup>491</sup>

Fraser thinks an injustice can be predominantly rooted in one social order because of the 'partial uncoupling' of the economic and status orders that capitalism engenders.<sup>492</sup> Under capitalism, she writes, 'economic mechanisms' are 'relatively decoupled from structures of prestige and... operate in a relatively autonomous way.'<sup>493</sup> Importantly, Fraser restricts the term 'economic' to 'its capitalist meaning', by which she seems to mean that she restricts it to a specialised 'marketized zone' of relations.<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>488</sup> Fraser (2003: 17-20).

<sup>489</sup> Fraser (2003: 17-19).

<sup>490</sup> Fraser (1999: 27; 2003: 17-19).

<sup>491</sup> Fraser (2003: 17-19).

<sup>492</sup> Fraser (2003: 21-24, 35).

<sup>493</sup> Fraser (2003: 35).

<sup>494</sup> Fraser (1998: 146); Fraser (2003: 58).

### 7.2.2. *Three Ambiguities*

Fraser developed perspectival dualism over many years. Within this work lie at least three ambiguities. First, her understanding of the economy remains brief and gestural, with the role of materiality appearing to shift. Second, her understanding of cultural recognition appears to have broadened. Third, over time, the causal ontology underlying Fraser's theory shifts and remains ambiguous. The centrality of these ambiguities makes them worth exploring.

#### (i) *Conceptualisation of the economy*

Fraser rarely explicitly defines the economy and the economic. One of her few statements on this responds to Butler's arguments for including the production of humans themselves in the category of the economic, making heterosexism and the regulation of sexuality economic too.<sup>495</sup> Discussing Butler's different approach, Fraser writes, 'I fail to see how this improves on my simpler strategy of restricting the term economic to its capitalist meaning.'<sup>496</sup> And she often uses 'the economy' and 'capitalism' synonymously.<sup>497</sup>

What is this 'capitalist meaning' of the economy? Fraser often talks as if the economy is synonymous with markets. She labels an imagined society in which the economic order entirely subsumes the cultural order as 'fully marketized'; markets decide everything, fully determining status and class.<sup>498</sup> And markets alone are described as the economy's 'core institutions.'<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>495</sup> Butler (1998).

<sup>496</sup> Fraser (1998: 146).

<sup>497</sup> Fraser (1998: 285; 1999: 36).

<sup>498</sup> Fraser (2003: 52).

<sup>499</sup> Fraser (2003: 58).

Economic and cultural perspectives, and their respective social orders, are described as ‘analytically distinct’ from one another.<sup>500</sup> For Fraser, the economy is ‘objective’, while the cultural zone, ‘intersubjective.’<sup>501</sup> But she does not directly explain what is more objective about the economy, or more intersubjective about culture. Young and Butler both at times interpret Fraser’s definition of the economy to rest on an ‘economic as material / culture as immaterial’ division – an understandable interpretation given how Fraser sometimes used ‘material’, ‘distributive’, and ‘economic’ synonymously in earlier work.<sup>502</sup> But she has since explicitly and forthrightly rejected this ‘economic materialism’, meaning the economic objectivity she seeks cannot be based on materialist foundations.<sup>503</sup>

Instead, it appears the objectivity of the economic rests on its value-free, impersonal, autonomous mechanisms, ‘logic’, and structure, as opposed to the value-laden, intersubjective ‘patterns’ of the cultural zone. For example, status subordination is ‘rooted in institutionalised patterns of cultural value’, and economic subordination in ‘structural features of the economic system.’<sup>504</sup> Economic ‘mechanisms’ are ‘decoupled from cultural value patterns and... operate in a relatively impersonal way.’<sup>505</sup> Markets ‘decontextualize and rework cultural patterns’, resulting in ‘a specialised zone’ in which cultural values do not directly regulate social

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<sup>500</sup> Fraser (2003: 50).

<sup>501</sup> Fraser (2003: 49, 53).

<sup>502</sup> Young (1997); Butler (1998); Fraser (1995).

<sup>503</sup> Fraser (1998). There are good reasons for this rejection. First, understandings of the economy which represent it as material (in contrast to the cultural realm’s immateriality) often borrow heavily from physics and, as such, encourage the naturalisation of ‘the economy’ (Mitchell 1998: 86; Mirowski 1988). Second, it struggles to recognise practices of provisioning so-called ‘immaterial goods’ like data and knowledge as important parts of the economy. It is common to view at least some kinds of immaterial goods as economic; the value of the European data market was estimated at over €59 million in 2016, for example (IDC & Open Evidence 2017). Nor ought we revise this inclusion given feminist arguments about the economic importance of ‘immaterial’ labour and goods like affective care and time (Coote & Himmelweit 2013; Fortunati 2007). Finally, it wrongly suggests the immateriality of the realm of culture (Williams 1977; Butler 1998).

<sup>504</sup> Fraser (2003: 50).

<sup>505</sup> Fraser (1999: 36).

interaction.<sup>506</sup> Thus, though economic mechanisms can ‘instrumentalize’ cultural values, the mechanisms themselves remain objective, relatively autonomous, and value-free.<sup>507</sup>

How are we to distinguish the economic social order, ‘in which interaction is regulated by the functional interlacing of strategic imperatives’, from the cultural social order, ‘regulated by institutionalized patterns of cultural value’?<sup>508</sup> Fraser’s answer returns to markets: economic ordering is ‘typically institutionalized in markets; cultural ordering may work through a variety of different institutions, including kinship, religion, and law.’<sup>509</sup>

## *(ii) Conceptualisation of culture*

Similarly, Fraser does not define ‘culture’ head-on. We glean her understanding from various definitions of recognition, which maps onto the cultural social order. In earlier work, recognition was associated with *difference* and identity politics, and the redistributive paradigm with equality.<sup>510</sup> However, in later work Fraser states that cultural recognition need not end here. As well as differentiated identity construction, she sees culture as concerning social status, meanings and norms more generally.<sup>511</sup> I take Fraser to draw on this broad understanding of the cultural zone, rather than tying cultural recognition to differentiated identity claims alone.

## *(iii) Background causal ontology*

As Chris Armstrong argues, Fraser’s background causal ontology has shifted over the course of her work and remains ambiguous even in recent writings. Fraser

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<sup>506</sup> Fraser (1999: 42).

<sup>507</sup> Fraser (2003: 49).

<sup>508</sup> Fraser (2003: 50).

<sup>509</sup> Fraser (2003: 51).

<sup>510</sup> Fraser (1995).

<sup>511</sup> Fraser (2000; 2003: 62).



explains the ontological separation between economic and cultural injustices in at least three different ways. First, and most prevalent in early work, Fraser suggests that while many injustices are two-dimensional, at least some are *purely* economic or cultural.<sup>512</sup> As Armstrong notes, Fraser's repeated insistence that gender and race are particular in being bivalent injustices also implies that others are not.<sup>513</sup> It is likewise hard to understand her repeated claims that the economy and culture are 'partially uncoupled' without drawing on this first causal-ontological theory.<sup>514</sup> If no areas of economy or culture are one-dimensional, where could we find *any* uncoupling of the 'zones'?

Elsewhere, Fraser invokes a second, different causal-ontological story. Here, she writes that though any given injustice will likely be two-dimensional, its 'ultimate origins', 'ultimate cause' or 'fundamental root' will nonetheless lie in either economy or culture.<sup>515</sup> Finally, Fraser sometimes writes as if all injustices are two-dimensional but with economic and cultural dimensions of differing *importance*. This emerges in later work, where perspectival dualism treats 'every practice as simultaneously economic and cultural, albeit not necessarily in equal proportions.'<sup>516</sup> This presents the proportions of an injustice's 'roots' in economy or culture as determined by the relative importance of economy and culture in bringing the injustice about.

This third interpretation of Fraser's theory is most charitable. It fits her claims that her culture/economy distinction is 'analytic' or 'social-theoretical' not ontological.<sup>517</sup> And it lets her sidestep the large amount of criticism her seemingly ontological 'root cause' talk has brought her.<sup>518</sup> For, briefly, if Fraser's dichotomy *is* ontological, her

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<sup>512</sup> Fraser (1995: 70–71).

<sup>513</sup> Armstrong (2008: 419).

<sup>514</sup> Armstrong (2008: 416).

<sup>515</sup> E.g. Fraser (1998: 144; 2003: 23–24).

<sup>516</sup> Fraser (2003: 63). The 'virtually every...' (Fraser 1995: 70) is now dropped.

<sup>517</sup> Fraser (1998: 148).

<sup>518</sup> Armstrong (2008); Swanson (2005); Yar (2001).

own criticism of substantive dualism applies: perspectival dualism would mistakenly inscribe contingent social categories that emerge historically from capitalism onto the world itself, helping naturalise them. The ontological claims of the other interpretations are very costly for perspectival dualism's plausibility.

I interpret Fraser's causal-ontological background theory as follows, then: as separating injustices along an economy-culture spectrum by assessing the *relative importance* of the injustice's economic and cultural origins, with economy and culture understood as 'historically emergent categories of social theory.'<sup>519</sup> Though the most charitable, this interpretation confronts Fraser with two questions. First, how to determine the relative importance of economy and culture if this distinction makes no ontological claims whatsoever? Understandably, Armstrong wonders how an analytical distinction with no ontological basis can be of any use.<sup>520</sup>

However, alone, I think this question need not be debilitating. Though always tricky to tie down the meanings of 'ontological' and 'analytical', Fraser might argue her distinction can work without drawing on *suspicious* ontological foundations at least. For example, we don't always dismiss assessments of the relative importance of different nations' contributions to outcomes as resting on dubious ontological claims about causal 'roots' remaining within national borders. We sometimes simply see nations as useful social-historical entities when theorising. In this way, perhaps Fraser can claim to rely only on historically emergent categories of social theory rather than an ontologically dubious background theory.

However, Armstrong's second question *should* worry Fraser: if perspectival dualism sees every injustice as necessarily economic and cultural, what now separates it from anti-dualism? I think Fraser would most likely appeal to two distinctive,

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<sup>519</sup> Fraser (1999: 40).

<sup>520</sup> Armstrong (2008: 415).

interconnected features of her theory here: the economy-culture spectrum and the distinctive understanding of culture, economy, and their relationship. I will argue that both are deeply problematic, meaning that Fraser should abandon the features that set her account apart from anti-dualism.

### 7.3. Challenging Perspectival Dualism

On my reading, then, perspectival dualism asserts the need to assess the relative importance of economy and culture in explaining an injustice, where these are not ontological categories but historically emergent social-theoretical constructs. The economy is a 'specialized marketized zone', and the cultural zone pertains to laws, norms, meanings, and identity and status formations. My interpretation of Fraser's causal ontology relinquishes one important way to distinguish perspectival dualism from anti-dualism. For this interpretation takes Fraser to see every injustice as simultaneously cultural-recognitive and economic-distributive, albeit to different degrees (because these dimensions will be of differing importance in bringing the injustice about).

When Armstrong considers this interpretation, he wonders what might remain distinctive about Fraser's account if we accept it. As mentioned, I think three interconnected aspects of Fraser's account do keep it distinctive: her economy-culture spectrum, along with her understanding of cultural recognition and the economy. However, in this section I argue that Fraser should give up on these features and embrace anti-dualism. To make this argument, I draw on two of Fraser's examples.

Fraser uses these examples to show why we must avoid both reductive economism (which she associates with 'vulgar Marxism') and reductive culturism (which she

associates with Axel Honneth).<sup>521</sup> In other words, they show why economic distributions are not all that matter, but nor are cultural norms and meanings.<sup>522</sup> The first concerns an injustice suffered by a white worker and is worth quoting in full:

*Witness the case of the skilled white male industrial worker who becomes unemployed due to a factory closing resulting from a speculative corporate merger... [This] injustice of maldistribution has little to do with misrecognition. It is rather a consequence of imperatives intrinsic to an order of specialized economic relations whose raison d'être is the accumulation of profits. To handle such cases, a theory of justice must reach beyond cultural value patterns to examine the structure of capitalism. It must ask whether the mechanisms that are relatively decoupled from structures of prestige and that operate in a relatively autonomous way impede parity of participation in social life.*<sup>523</sup>

The second example is that of the injustice suffered by an African America Wall Street banker who cannot get a taxi to pick him up. Similarly, Fraser writes that, 'to handle such cases, a theory of justice must reach beyond the distribution of rights and goods to examine institutionalized patterns of cultural value.'<sup>524</sup>

The case of the white worker is meant to illustrate that not all maldistribution is a product of misrecognition, and I am entirely persuaded of this.<sup>525</sup> But I am unconvinced that perspectival dualism, even culled of its dubious ontological baggage, can capture everything important about this injustice. Specifically, it

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<sup>521</sup> Fraser (2000: 111; 2003: 34).

<sup>522</sup> For these associations, see Fraser (2000).

<sup>523</sup> Fraser (2003: 34).

<sup>524</sup> Fraser (2003: 34).

<sup>525</sup> I here simply assume we must avoid reductive economism and reductive culturism.

struggles to capture aspects of the injustice important to those of us who want to take the intersection of race, class and gender seriously.

First, I argue that this case should persuade us to jettison Fraser's economy-culture spectrum imagery and, second, her distinctive understanding of status recognition as only to do with subordination. Then, using the Wall St banker case, I argue that this does not go far enough; we should also let go of Fraser's understanding of the economy as 'analytically distinct' from culture.

### 7.3.1. *Against the Economy-Culture Spectrum*

*[T]his is our vision: Britain leading the global economy... drawing on the talents of all to create British jobs for British workers."* – Gordon Brown (then Labour Prime Minister)<sup>526</sup>

Fraser's economy-culture spectrum situates class injustices at the far 'economy' end, race and gender in the middle, and injustices suffered by 'despised sexualities' at the far 'cultural' end. The white worker case thus sits tight towards the economy end since Fraser sees almost all the important features of this injustice as arising from the economy. This appears the point of making him white, skilled, and male, for then few obvious claims of misrecognition along gender or race lines arise, and claims of class-based misrecognition are blunted.

Perspective dualism holds that primarily economic injustices are such because they stem most importantly from the economic social order, implying the relative unimportance of the cultural order. This is why the spectrum is a spectrum: the more

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<sup>526</sup> Brown's first speech to Labour Conference as leader – September 2007 (as quoted in Summers {2009} who lists Brown's other repetitions of this phrase). The phrase is still used on the left - Owen Smith recently stated he had 'no problem with British jobs for British workers as an aspiration' (Shabi 2017).

important the economic origins of an injustice, the less important its cultural origins. Our worker is thus portrayed as suffering as close to an idealised case of purely economic injustice as is perhaps possible (given the concession that all injustices have some 'dual aspect' to them).

But this portrayal is problematic. Critical race theorists have long challenged the assumption that the white experience is the 'neutral' classed experience, just as feminists have long challenging assumptions that men's experiences are the 'neutral' classed experience. As Hazel V. Carby writes, 'racism ensures that black men do not have the same relations to patriarchal/capitalist hierarchies as white men.'<sup>527</sup> Our worker's whiteness deeply affects the kind and shape of injustice he suffers when he loses his job, and thus the remedies required too.

How does his whiteness affect the injustice suffered? In the UK, for example, 'most ethnic groups fared worse during the [2008] recession because of higher non-employment, fewer hours worked, lower labour-market earnings, lower self-employment rates, lower self-employment earnings, lower investment income and higher housing costs.'<sup>528</sup> Given this, our white worker will likely have experienced both employment and unemployment very differently to people from other ethnic groups. For example, he will have smaller housing costs, greater investment income, and also be able to translate his skills more easily into re-employment.<sup>529</sup>

His whiteness likely also affects how his unemployment is perceived by the wider community and, in turn, the political sympathy available to him. This affects the support or compound harms likely to follow. The white, male working class is afforded attention that working-class people of colour can only wish for – attention

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<sup>527</sup> Carby (1982: 212).

<sup>528</sup> Fisher and Nandi (2015).

<sup>529</sup> Chief (2016).

focused on differentiating them from the rest of the working class via race and gender, rather than on class barriers and injustices themselves. Take popular arguments claiming that the eclipse of class by identity politics uniquely harmed the white, male, working-class, as if the struggles of other sections of the working class can simply and neatly be transformed into class-quietist gender or race politics.<sup>530</sup>

These elements challenge the implicit assumption that subordinating misrecognition is the only way cultural recognition importantly affects injustices. Supposing cultural patterns do not importantly shape this injustice is a case of ‘methodological whiteness’: a failure to acknowledge how race structures the world, resulting in treating a limited perspective, derived from white experience, as universal.<sup>531</sup> In doing so, such approaches deny their own politics of identity. The concept of methodological whiteness highlights the dangers of thinking we can unify and harmonise class politics, anti-racism and feminism by isolating them for separate analysis one by one and then adding our results together.<sup>532</sup>

Fraser claims perspectival dualism becomes particularly important for ‘intersecting’ identities because, ‘for example, anyone who is both gay and working-class will need both redistribution and recognition, regardless of what one makes of those two categories taken singly.’<sup>533</sup> True, in that if our choice is between recognising only ‘economic’ injustices traditionally conceived, or only so-called ‘identity-based’ injustices, or perspectival dualism, then perspectival dualism is far and away our best choice.

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<sup>530</sup> e.g. ‘White Season’ (2008); Maidment (2018); Fox (2016).

<sup>531</sup> Bhabra (2017).

<sup>532</sup> Collins (2000) likewise cautions against ‘adding on’ approaches. Armstrong (2008: 417) describes this as one of the ‘key lessons of black or lesbian feminisms.’ Young (2006) makes a similar argument regarding the analysis of gender and class, though aimed at ‘dual systems theory’ in general rather than perspectival dualism about economy and culture.

<sup>533</sup> Fraser (2003: 26).

But these are not our only options. Rather than the 'two-pronged' approach Fraser recommends, we might examine how the 'prongs' themselves interact: how they might, in fact, not be best thought of as separate prongs at all. Such a task necessitates a class analysis and politics not built on the examination of our white male worker's experiences, presented as immune from status-based issues because he is not black or female, but one that recognises the significant effects of raced and gendered recognition in shaping all workers' economic experiences.<sup>534</sup>

More concretely, Fraser's gay working-class person does not need redistribution and recognition 'regardless of what one makes of those two categories taken singly.'<sup>535</sup> They need forms of redistribution and recognition that recognise how their class affects the homophobia they face, and how their homosexuality affects the class subordination they face.<sup>536</sup> Economic remedies worked out from our straight, white skilled worker – our 'purest case' of redistributive injustice as possible – plus remedies worked out from a middle-class white gay man – our 'purest case' of cultural injustice as is possible – may well not fit their needs. Perspectival dualism tries to untangle their experiences of homophobia and class subordination. But both are likely often manifest in single experiences – experiences shaped simultaneously by their class and sexuality.

We should therefore reject this two-dimensional economy-culture spectrum, with class towards the economic end, race and gender in the middle, and heterosexism towards the cultural end. Raced recognition importantly shapes the injustice our white worker suffers when laid off: it affects the remedies available to him, the impact of unemployment (given how race affects his access to reemployment), his living costs, and his previous access to higher wages for longer hours. There is no

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<sup>534</sup> Combahee River Collective (2005).

<sup>535</sup> Fraser (2003: 26).

<sup>536</sup> Taylor (2007).



race-neutral class injustice the remedy for which suits skilled white workers as perfectly as it suits skilled workers of colour. To ignore this perpetuates 'methodological whiteness' since the status quo falls back on the white experience as universal. Try as we might to find a case as close to the 'economy' end of the spectrum as possible, raced recognition remains important, pulling us back to an approach in which cultural recognition retains a role in shaping all economic injustices.

### 7.3.2. *Against limiting cultural misrecognition to subordination*

This also gives us reason to reject Fraser's unconventional understanding of status as an order of intersubjective *subordination* derived from institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute some members of society as less than full partners in interaction.<sup>537</sup> To integrate claims for redistribution and recognition we must be aware of status dominance as well as status subordination. This lets us see the subordination of people of colour and women as constitutive of a white, male social identity.

Subordinated groups gaining 'full participator parity' (in Fraser's terms) therefore requires recognising how participation is currently tailored towards those with status dominance. This means recognising that status dominance exists (not just status subordination), and that it is an important part of the problem. We have reason to let go another distinctive element of perspectival dualism: its understanding of status as uniquely linked to recognitive subordination.

### 7.3.3. *Against the Economy as an 'Autonomous' A-cultural Marketized Zone*

In response to the above, I suspect Fraser would argue I have misconstrued her understanding of the economic-distributive and its analytical distinctness from the

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<sup>537</sup> Fraser (2003: 49).

cultural-recognitive. It is these understandings her two-dimensional spectrum is based on, after all. I now argue that we have good reason to avoid her definition and delimitation of the economy, through discussion of two possible responses she might give.

***Response 1: Perspectival dualism as normative framework only***

Fraser might argue that insofar as we are interested in investigating injustices, perspectival dualism gives an insightful account of the injustice our skilled white worker suffers. Yes, his experience is shaped by privileged misrecognition, this response would go, but the *injustice* is primarily one of maldistribution not misrecognition, and these categories of injustice remain analytically distinct and useful. This gives up on perspectival dualism as social theory to salvage it as a normative political framework. For, in recognising that the maldistributive injustice our worker suffers *is* importantly constituted by his gender, race and sexuality, cultural recognition is acknowledged to importantly co-constitute the experiences of (and practices within) the supposedly semi-autonomous, specialised ‘marketized zone’ of economic relations.

Though this concession is welcome, it does not go far enough. By silencing the effect of privileged misrecognition on the injustice our white worker suffers, a space remains for suggested remedies that not only do not harmonise across different distributive and recognitive injustices but might even worsen them. To see the dangers of this, we need only look to the post-WWII history of English trade unions responding to the precarity of white workers with what John Wrench characterises as, at worst, ‘appalling racism and often by an indefensible neglect of the issues of

race.’<sup>538</sup> He reports that in the mid-80s, a ‘colour blind’ attitude ‘was found to be one of the main problems that black workers had to face in unions.’<sup>539</sup>

Satnam Virdee argues that, central to English trade unionist racism in the post-WWII decades was the idea that ‘migrant labour represented a source of cheap labour that threatened the economic security of ‘white’ organised labour.’<sup>540</sup> Such a response is painfully familiar from the Brexit campaign.<sup>541</sup> The danger of racist remedies being advocated and employed to help remedy our white worker’s injustice is alive and well in the current moment.

Ruling our worker’s whiteness as irrelevant when thinking about how to confront the real and serious injustices he faces leaves room for remedies that perpetuate (or deepen) exploitation of people of colour. Holding that our skilled white worker suffers an injustice primarily of maldistribution rather than misrecognition is, on my current interpretation of Fraser, to say that economic maldistribution is of far greater importance relative to cultural misrecognition in tracing the ‘roots’ of the injustice. But of importance to *whom*? This remains ambiguous and Fraser does not discuss it.

Most likely, Fraser would want us to judge the relative importance of the injustice’s origins from the perspective of someone looking to, in her words, ‘devise an overarching conception of justice that can accommodate both defensible claims for economic equality and defensible claims for the recognition of difference... minimizing the mutual interferences likely to arise when the two sorts of redress are sought simultaneously.’<sup>542</sup> Taking the whiteness of our worker into account need not and should not dismiss or diminish the injustice he suffers. But it might help ensure

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<sup>538</sup> Wrench (1989).

<sup>539</sup> Wrench (1989).

<sup>540</sup> Virdee (2000: 551).

<sup>541</sup> Virdee and McGeever (2017: 5–7).

<sup>542</sup> Fraser (2004).

any remedies that perpetuate or intensify the exploitation of people of colour are ruled indefensible from the start, for it forces us to notice how remedies that might help him would affect these groups.

Because of this, I am wary of this defence of perspectival dualism. But this might not persuade everyone; you might think we can rule out racist solutions to our worker's injustice in other ways. However, this defence faces another, deeper problem, that the next response draws out. This is that 'economic mechanisms' and 'cultural patterns' are simply not 'analytically distinct', as Fraser claims. Correspondingly, nor are 'injustices of maldistribution' and 'injustices of misrecognition'. With this distinction undermined, the spectrum imagery is irreparable and – I argue – we are forced to give up on perspectival dualism as a normative framework *and* as social theory.

### ***Response 2: The economy and culture as 'analytically distinct' zones***

Perspectival dualists might instead argue that, only *insofar* as our white worker's injustice is traceable to the specialised marketized zone of economic relations alone, is it predominantly a maldistributive injustice. Insofar as skilled workers of colour suffer different injustices in the same lay-off, they are less economic and more cultural, though no less important. And if our worker's whiteness allows him privileged recognition that affects his experiences, it is nothing to do with the economic injustice we are interested in isolating here. But (this response maintains) our white worker's injustice has its most important roots in the economic zone, just as his position is most importantly determined by this zone.

This tries to preserve perspectival dualism as social theory and as normative political framework: it claims the theory gives the right explanation of both how to understand the relations between class and status, and how the left should approach

this injustice. It does so by leaning heavily on Fraser's understanding of the economy as a specialised and relatively autonomous zone of markets – a zone of objective a-cultural structures and strategic behaviours, in contrast to the cultural zone's 'fragmented patterns' of 'intersubjective' interaction. This conception of the economy is the last distinctive feature of perspectival dualism and, to end, I argue we should steer well clear of it.

Turn to Fraser's second example: our black Wall St Banker who cannot get a cab to pick him up. This is meant to show that not all misrecognition is a product of maldistribution and, again, I think we should simply accept this; Fraser is right that misrecognition should not be reduced to maldistribution, nor vice versa. But this leaves the possibility of an anti-dualism that sees distribution and recognition as importantly co-constitutive wide open. I will argue that perspectival dualism's understanding of the economy and its split between the economy and culture struggle to make sense of this injustice.

To handle this case, Fraser writes, 'a theory of justice must reach beyond the distribution of rights and goods to examine institutionalized patterns of cultural value.'<sup>543</sup> By painting our man as a Wall Street Banker, Fraser suggests there is little of redistributive importance to this example; hence the need to look to the zone of cultural recognition. I will argue that we cannot make sense of this injustice by separating recognition and distribution like this and pitting their importance against one another. Understanding economy and culture as co-constitutive avoids eliding important mechanisms through which injustices like this arise and repeat.

Why will taxis not stop for our banker? Presumably, as Fraser suggests, because of racist cultural representations. But representations do not arise from nowhere; they

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<sup>543</sup> Fraser (2003: 34).

must be produced and reproduced. Representations of black men as bad or risky customers cannot be divorced from a history in which black people were portrayed as less than fully human – as irrational and bestial – to justify and explain European expropriation of black land, labour, and lives (Wynter, 2003). Colonial redistributions of rights and goods both relied on and encouraged production of racist representations from the start.

Such racist representations are not just vestiges of history; their ‘afterlives’ remain powerful today. African Americans are frequently denied economic goods, services and opportunities because of these representations; our banker’s lack of a taxi is one instance of a wider phenomenon.<sup>544</sup> This means that as a group, African Americans are poorer.<sup>545</sup> In these ways, racist representations importantly structure distributions.

These representations remain present and powerful because they are reproduced by contemporary discourses, practices, and material circuits – and, again, distributive injustices play a significant role in their reproduction. African American poverty is used to justify and reproduce representations of African Americans as bad, risky economic agents.<sup>546</sup> Take Obama’s speech to a class of young black men: ‘[T]oo many young men in our community continue to make bad choices.’ And, he goes on to ‘confess’, ‘sometimes I wrote off my own failings as just another example of the world trying to keep a black man down. But... excuses are tools of the incompetent.’<sup>547</sup> This is emblematic of the tendency to represent black poverty as individual irrationality (‘bad choices’).

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<sup>544</sup> Bonilla-Silva (2017: 25); Quillian *et al.* (2017).

<sup>545</sup> Long (2017).

<sup>546</sup> Bonilla-Silva (2017: 1, 39-43).

<sup>547</sup> Quoted in Coates (2013).

Following Sylvia Wynter, we might describe this as apparent verification by systemic production: racist representations pattern distributions, which are then taken as evidence confirming racist representations.<sup>548</sup> The racist representations that leave our banker without a taxi and raced patterns of distribution across the U.S are co-constitutive – they co-evolve, mutually constituting and reconstituting one another, to maintain and reproduce a raced social order. Even if our banker somehow previously avoided these distributive injustices, they still play a key role in reproducing contemporary raced representations that leave him taxi-less. Perspectival dualists' painting of such raced injustices as 'more cultural than economic' overlooks this.

This co-constitutive relationship is important. First, recognising the interaction between representations and distributions helps explain the persistence of racism within the USA. Rather than weighing the importance of representations versus distributions in a zero-sum calculation, we can recognise that racism has persisted because racist representations present themselves as explaining contemporary raced distributions, helping cement their apparent truth, when in fact these representations perpetuate these distributions. We miss this if we separate the intersubjective 'ideological'/representational elements of racism from its manifestations in distributions, practices and relations, to analyse these separately and weigh their importance against one another.

Second, and related, putting the importance of raced distributions back into the picture slots this example into broader social context. Our banker's experience is not representative of much contemporary anti-black racism in the USA, but nor is it separable from this wider story. Tracing the co-constitutive distributive and

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<sup>548</sup> Wynter (2003: 326).

representative origins of his experience re-contextualises his experience, letting us better understand it.

Can perspectival dualists acknowledge that representations and distributions co-constitute one another? To end, I argue that they cannot. My argument is in three stages: First, I explain why their approach must divide this co-constitutive 'loop' into mutually exclusive halves, 'analytically' if not ontologically. Second, I argue that Fraser's chosen divide is politically problematic. And, finally, I suggest that no better 'analytically distinct' divide is possible, because legal structures and wider cultural understandings at once represent and form part of the economic structure.

As mentioned, Fraser often talks of the 'analytic distinctness' of economic and cultural perspectives.<sup>549</sup> This cannot only be an insistence that economy and culture mean different things, for even Butler – arch-anti-dualist in Fraser's eyes – does not suggest that the terms mean the same thing, only that the line between them is fuzzy and unstable.<sup>550</sup> If this was all Fraser's 'analytic distinctness' was to suggest, her whole project would arise in opposition to a straw person. She must then retain some stronger sense of the 'analytic distinctness' of economic and cultural perspectives than simply that they centre different aspects of the social.

More likely, Fraser means the historically contingent categories of economy and culture are 'analytically distinct' in that they divide aspects of the social into two mutually exclusive kinds – economic-distributive and cultural-representative. On this interpretation, we divide into mutually exclusive parts because we work with the contingent contemporary categorisations of economy and culture that are mutually exclusive. This retains Fraser's distance from Butler's anti-dualism, while maintaining our interpretation of her background causal ontology.

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<sup>549</sup> E.g. Fraser (2003: 50).

<sup>550</sup> Butler (1998).



On this reading, then, perspectival dualism splits our co-constitutive representation-distribution loops into two mutually exclusive halves for analysis. The raced representations just discussed are thus themselves non-economic by definition – at most, ‘inputs’ to the economy. And this economy/culture split, as Fraser acknowledges, arises from dominant understandings of contemporary capitalist societies.

But this economy/culture split serves a purpose within capitalism. Painting the economy as an a-cultural realm of objective facts, mechanisms and strategic imperatives sets it beyond the contingency of politics and culture, and so, beyond dispute. As Wynter points out, by viewing the so-called ‘strategic logic’ of homo oeconomicus as an objective a-cultural reality, we render it non-theorisable as a particularly western ‘culture and class-specific’ conception of human behaviour.<sup>551</sup> It matters little whether we use this a-cultural frame because it is historically dominant rather than because we see deep ontological truth in it; reproducing it within our social theory, we strengthen its hold. This politically laden economy/culture split is too friendly to capitalism’s preferred colour-blind, value-neutral portrayal of itself.

Perspectival dualists cannot fix this by simply altering the cut they make between economy and culture. For, I will argue, we cannot coherently divide these loops into mutually exclusive halves; economic-distributive ‘mechanisms’ are created and reproduced through certain representations, making these representations vital parts of the economic structure. Contra Fraser, cultural value patterns are not ‘beyond’ the structure of capitalism, but integral parts of it. To show this I again focus on raced representations: on how they structure ‘strategic’ economic agency and structure economic mechanisms through law.

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<sup>551</sup> Wynter (2003: 282).

First, raced representations structure supposedly value-neutral, a-cultural, ‘strategic’ economic agency. Fraser’s example shows how economic decisions are frequently mediated through racist representations, structuring resulting distributions. As discussed, African Americans are regularly denied economic goods, services and opportunities on offer to their white counterparts. Each of these denials is a ‘strategic economic choice’, for such real-world choices are replete with uncertainties and indeterminacies, leaving space for raced rules of thumb to guide actions. These representations structure our practices, and thus come to constitute our social relations. These networks of relations in turn constitute our social structures – in this case, ‘the economy’.

Second, raced representations structure many of the economy’s workings through law. Fraser sees law as part of the cultural social order but US law continues to protect what we might call ‘whiteness as property’ – whiteness as a status on the basis of which social benefits are allocated.<sup>552</sup> Take recently revived arguments that affirmative action programmes unlawfully discriminate against whites.<sup>553</sup> Such arguments have led courts to severely limit affirmative action programs, which are banned altogether in eight states.<sup>554</sup> As courts have viewed the normal workings of the economy as race-neutral, they have often seen race-based affirmative action as discriminatory. They thus defend whites’ settled expectations of a greater share of jobs and educational opportunities as a ‘neutral’ economic baseline.<sup>555</sup>

Or take the legal construction of home-carers, agricultural workers, and prison labourers – all disproportionately people of colour – as not proper ‘workers’, thus

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<sup>552</sup> Harris (1993); Lipsitz (1995).

<sup>553</sup> Savage (2017).

<sup>554</sup> *Economist* (2017).

<sup>555</sup> Harris (1993: 1750-1790).

denying them standard workers' rights.<sup>556</sup> For example, a 2007 US Supreme Court ruling set home carers (disproportionately women of colour) outside the Fair Labour Standards Act, even if employed by a for-profit company. A Justice defended this on the grounds that if these carers were covered by wage and hour laws, millions would be unable to afford home care, so that denying home carers the status of workers was in the public interest.<sup>557</sup> Home carers' own interests are here systematically underrepresented, as if they do not count as part of the relevant 'public'. This arises from the raced and feminized nature of their labour and helps reproduce current economic distributions and expectations.

Though it garners less critical attention, much of this also holds true for the UK.<sup>558</sup> UK home care workers likewise struggle to access minimum wages, even when employed by private companies.<sup>559</sup> Such work is done primarily by women and 'increasingly by migrant women.'<sup>560</sup> Joann McGregor found raced divisions between permanent and temporary caring staff, with better working conditions secured by predominantly white permanent carers.<sup>561</sup>

The gendered and classed effects of recent welfare reforms have also channelled working class women into feminized professions. Emily Grabham & Jenny Smith detail evidence of the UK's 'work/welfare circuit, whereby women come off benefits only temporarily and, when they are in work, provide a pool of ultra-cheap labour with, at best, precarious conditions and few possibilities for advancement in highly

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<sup>556</sup> Zatz and Boris (2013).

<sup>557</sup> Boris and Klein (2012: 8-10).

<sup>558</sup> I do not mean to suggest that all economies are raced and gendered in the same ways. To take just one example, in settler-colonial contexts western capitalist understandings of what constitutes labour are used to appropriate indigenous land in ways not applicable to the UK (Povinelli 1995).

<sup>559</sup> Merrill (2016); Plimmer (2018). Though the differential status of their work is not enshrined in law in the same way as in the USA.

<sup>560</sup> Mullally and Murphy (2015: 59).

<sup>561</sup> McGregor (2007: 814-15).

gendered occupations.’<sup>562</sup> Given that the UK poverty rate is twice as high for BME groups, the racial composition of this group of women is likely highly skewed.<sup>563</sup>

The UK has the largest prison population in the EU, and the most privatised prison system in Europe.<sup>564</sup> Black people are imprisoned at a more disproportionate rate in the UK than in the US, and prisoners who work earn an average wage of £9.60 a week.<sup>565</sup> The UK has one of the largest immigration detention estates in Europe, also increasingly privatised, and predominantly peopled by detainees of colour who likewise work for well below minimum wage and without the legal protections standardly accorded to ‘workers.’<sup>566</sup>

Raced representations are therefore not best understood as ‘inputs’ to the economy. By patterning ‘strategic’ agency and informing the legal framework that limits and constitutes economic activity, they structure the economy. I focused on raced representations, but this argument generalises: without underpinning representations in the form of social norms and legal structures, there is no ‘specialised marketized zone’. Capitalist markets cannot survive without laws determining who counts as an ‘employee’, or norms supporting decision-making shortcuts under uncertainty.

Fraser’s imagined ‘fully marketized society’, then, is a fantasy: no market can exist without legal frameworks and social norms underpinning their function and setting

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<sup>562</sup> Grabham & Smith (2010: 83). This matches my experience as a community worker: the working-class women who accessed our support – the majority of whom were women of colour – were often bounced between a disapproving benefits system and in-work poverty due to their extremely low-paid, precarious carework roles.

<sup>563</sup> Weekes-Bernard (2017). Grabham & Smith (2010: 82) write that the gendered welfare reform debates around getting lone parents into work ‘operate within, and arguably contribute to, embedded structural racism.’

<sup>564</sup> Bell (2013).

<sup>565</sup> Lammy (2017: 3); Bell (2013: 59).

<sup>566</sup> Bales and Mayblin (2018). For further discussion of this see Chapter 8, Section 3.2.

their form.<sup>567</sup> These frameworks and norms cannot themselves be marketized on pain of infinite regress. The supposed 'autonomy' of markets is one of capitalism's depoliticising myths; left-leaning, feminist, anti-racist approaches should not perpetuate it.

Let's bring this back to our stranded banker. Fraser is right that he cannot get a taxi due to racist representations. But if we end our analysis there, our understanding of this injustice remains shallow. To understand why such raced representations remain prevalent and powerful, we must look to how these representations are co-constituted by unjust raced distributions. These distributions are taken as apparent verification of raced representations, when they are in fact produced and reproduced by them. The cultural representations and economic distributions that comprise systemic anti-black racism co-evolve and co-constitute one another.

This leads to two problems for Fraser. First, her adoption of the dominant capitalist method of splitting this co-constitutive loop is politically problematic: the resulting split depoliticises of the economy and is too friendly to capitalism's preferred representation of itself. Second, Fraser cannot improve this spilt; this loop cannot be sensibly divided into two mutually exclusive halves since the 'specialised marketized zone' is necessarily structured by representations. Raced representations, for example, structure 'strategic' economic agency and the legal system that constitutes economic mechanisms.

Understanding the economy as an objective, a-cultural, partially autonomous zone, analytically distinct from the cultural social order is thus politically problematic and implausibly ungrounded. We should instead view economic distributions as

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<sup>567</sup> See Anderson (2004a) and Phillips (2008) for similar arguments.

importantly constituted by cultural representations and vice versa. To best understand our banker's experience, we must be anti-dualists.

## **7.4. Conclusion: Moving Beyond Perspectival Dualism**

Perspectival dualism is the best form of economy-culture dualism around; it rejects the 'separate spheres' approach and refuses to pit class against identity. Yet by insisting on the capitalist understanding of the economy as a 'partially autonomous zone' and viewing the importance of economy and culture as zero-sum, it never quite manages to rid itself of the pitfalls of substantive dualism. Fraser's attempt to tread a path between substantive dualism and anti-dualism ultimately fails.

The insights of critical race theorists are central to illustrating the reasons for this: once you take seriously the experiences of working-class people of colour, and give up on the idea that the white experience is 'neutral', the picture of the economy as a value-free, mechanical structure, relatively autonomous from systems of racialized recognition quickly becomes untenable. The economy end of Fraser's spectrum, it turns out, is itself constituted by cultural representations, meaning her two-dimensional spectrum starts to look like nothing of the sort. Furthermore, examining how economic distributions co-constitute cultural representations deepens our understanding of how western economies remain raced and gendered. Of course, I have not yet shown that anti-dualism about economy and culture is a coherent position that can take seriously the intersection of gender, race and class and avoid the problems that Fraser attributes to it. Chapter 8 takes up this work.

## 8. RETHEORISING THE ECONOMY: FROM JODI DEAN TO SOCIAL REPRODUCTION THEORY

*The nation can now be seen as something imagined, the state as an indeterminate political project, the public sphere as a structure of exclusion, and class, ethnicity and gender as contingent and unstable constructions. It is unclear why the concept of the economy has not been placed in question in the same way. – Timothy Mitchell (1998: 84)*

### 8.1. Introduction

Contemporary politics is shaped and coloured by the aftershocks of the worst financial crisis in global history and the first tremors of climate catastrophe; the results have taken the form of rising right-nationalism, with intensified fears around migration, as well as increasing left mobilisations.<sup>568</sup> These experiences and effects have brought to the fore how stubbornly inseparable issues of race, national belonging, borders, and survival are from issues of class, ‘productivity’, and economic security. In this context, the resurgent ‘class versus identity’ debate is perhaps unsurprising. If, as argued in the last chapter, Nancy Fraser’s perspectival dualism cannot best guide us through such issues, where should we look instead?

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<sup>568</sup> I take this characterisation of the 2008 crash from Tooze (2019), who adopts it from the Chair of the US Federal Reserve (and defends it). Klein (2016) deftly outlines how climate change has already generated water shortages and food price increases which have, in turn, fed into various violent conflicts and affected refugee flows.

In this chapter, I consider Jodi Dean's contemporary economy-culture dualism to see if it fares better than Fraser's in its ability to take both class and race seriously and to adequately theorise their intersection. Though Dean's work shows some initially promising signs of having shed the methodological whiteness that dogged Fraser's approach, I argue that this impression is misleading. Her dualism, like Fraser's, struggles to capture the intersection of class and race.

Building on lessons learned from my analyses of Fraser and Dean, I then construct an alternative, anti-dualist understanding of the economy. I suggest we understand 'the economy' as a harmful theoretical objectification of certain practices, and resources – harmful because it helps shore up and naturalise raced, classed, and gendered relations of domination. I argue that this theoretical objectification systematically undervalues and overlooks certain groups' labour and utilises a conception of commensurable 'public value' based on racially exclusionary imaginaries of the public. Drawing on social reproduction theory, I suggest how we might build a better, counter-hegemonic understanding of the economy. Animated by the logic of sustaining life and therefore picking out a different set of practices and resources, this understanding – I suggest – would invite us to rethink public value in anti-racist, feminist and socialist ways.

The chapter ends with a consideration of the implications of Chapters 6 and 7 for how relational egalitarians approach distributive justice. Due to the co-constitution of economic distributions and socio-political statuses and identities, I suggest relational egalitarians ought to endorse further-reaching and deeper changes to economic-distributive practices than those Anderson calls for. Due to space constraints, in this chapter I continue to focus primarily on the intersections of race and class.



## 8.2. Contemporary Left Critiques of Identity Politics: The Case of Jodi Dean

Jodi Dean is part of a group of theorists who see themselves as working to reinvigorate a left that has wallowed in melancholia for far too long.<sup>569</sup> She advocates a re-centring of class politics along with a return to the idea of communism as a utopian horizon to work towards.<sup>570</sup> There is much to agree with in Dean's work. For example, she argues against what she labels 'left individualism', singling out for particular criticism Charles Leadbeater's proposal that 'If the left stands for one thing, it should be this: people taking more responsibility for all aspects of their lives.'<sup>571</sup>

Furthermore, Dean's work theorises the importance of class while showing some promising signs of having shed Fraser's methodological whiteness. She argues against coding the working class as white and thinks expropriation and extraction as well as waged exploitation constitute the basis of class struggle.<sup>572</sup> She views her communism as informed by struggles over civil and women's rights, gay and trans rights.<sup>573</sup> Though she does not elaborate on exactly how it is so informed, she seems to envisage a Communist Party (her preferred political-organisational form) working as a solidaristic resource and consciousness raising space for women and black people.<sup>574</sup>

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<sup>569</sup> Jonathan Dean (2015) includes Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek in this group, which he labels the 'new communists'. For her discussion of 'left melancholia' see Jodi Dean (2012).

<sup>570</sup> Dean (2012).

<sup>571</sup> Leadbeater (1988) as quoted in Dean (2016a: 51).

<sup>572</sup> Dean (2016b).

<sup>573</sup> Dean (2012: 184).

<sup>574</sup> Dean (2016a: 211-231).

That Dean is nonetheless a strident critic of identity politics should therefore worry those of us interested in building on the best of identity politics via intersectional analyses. Moreover, she connects her criticisms of identity politics to arguments that the left has become overly in thrall to ideas of individual choice and responsibility. Given that I make similar arguments (Chapters 3-6) about the need to move beyond ideas of individual choice and responsibility, her emphatic claim that identity politics can only harm class politics is worth investigation.<sup>575</sup>

Dean's arguments against identity politics come in two main strands: first, she rejects the individualism and depoliticised fixity of the identity categories she thinks it invokes. Second, she argues that while identity politics aims to create space for individual 'difference', only class struggle aims to fundamentally transform society in the necessary ways. I now address these arguments in turn.

For Dean, identity politics is *necessarily* individualistic, depoliticising, and fragmenting – it inhibits solidarity and relies on the exclusion of class.<sup>576</sup> She tires of hearing 'ad infinitum' that the personal is political, which she understands as shrinking politics to bids for personal value based on the unique authenticity of one's own experiences and excluding structural analyses.<sup>577</sup> She decries the 'fixity' read into identity categories and the solidarity-undermining practices of 'calling out and shaming'.<sup>578</sup>

Against this, Dean advocates class struggle that unites us as a collective, 'the people'. The people are a political - rather than an empirical - category defined by their shared experiences of capitalist exploitation and expropriation. This move is designed to block accusations that 'the people' is another way of invoking 'a politics

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<sup>575</sup> Dean (2016a: 50–54).

<sup>576</sup> Dean (2016b).

<sup>577</sup> Dean (2016a: 264; 2016b).

<sup>578</sup> Dean (2016b; 2016a: 256).

of identity.'<sup>579</sup> Unlike with Dean's version of identity politics, the people's collective identity is not reducible to individual identities; it is a 'common relation to a common condition of division.'<sup>580</sup> For example, the Occupy slogan 'we are the 99%', 'does not unify this collectivity under a *substantial* identity - race, ethnicity, nationality.'<sup>581</sup> Class struggle but not identity politics, then, draws on political rather than substantial or empirical categories.

Yet it is unclear what Dean means by labelling race, but not the people, a 'substantial' identity. She cannot mean that race is an empirical category, given widespread acceptance that races are socio-political constructs not biological groups. Nor is it uncommon for anti-racist theory and practice to understand race as arising from and based on antagonistic oppressive social relations. For example, race 'names a relation of subordination.'<sup>582</sup>

As Barbara Tomlinson points out, for those concerned with anti-subordination, 'the experience and subjectivity of specific identities is not really the focus of the argument but rather a proxy or tool to examine and counter structural injustice and subordination.'<sup>583</sup> Crenshaw and Cho likewise argue that intersectional theorists are primarily interested in structural power dynamics and are attentive to identities due to how they arise out of and relate to such dynamics.<sup>584</sup> *This* form of identity politics reveals how 'the people' are hardly the only subject produced through certain modes of subordination or exploitation. It also reveals how there is nothing

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<sup>579</sup> Dean (2012: 80).

<sup>580</sup> Dean (2012, 191).

<sup>581</sup> Dean (2012: 200) – my emphasis.

<sup>582</sup> Chen (2013). See also Bonilla-Silva (2017: 9–10). On gender as a socio-political relational category see Haslanger (2012d: 228) and Allen (2015: 514).

<sup>583</sup> Tomlinson (2013: 1000).

<sup>584</sup> Cho *et al.* (2013: 796–798).

necessarily individualistic about this kind of identity politics, given that its primary concern is with structural power relations.<sup>585</sup>

Dean therefore invokes classed 'subjectification' in similar ways to how the best discussions of race invoke racialised identity – and, more generally, in similar ways to how the best forms of identity politics invoke identities. By portraying the people as unique in utilising a collective, non-essentialist subject/identity category for political struggle, Dean unfairly caricatures too much good theory and activism. For these reasons, this first argument against identity politics is not convincing.

What of Dean's second argument, then? This arises from her understanding of class struggle as the 'fundamental antagonism through which society emerges.'<sup>586</sup> To explain this, she points to her work on Žižek where we learn that class struggle 'operates according to a logic fundamentally different from that of identity politics.'<sup>587</sup> Whereas the basic goal of feminist, gay, and anti-racist activists is (apparently) to 'find ways of getting along... to translate antagonism into difference', class struggle does not aim for 'mutual recognition or respect' but rather at 'transforming relations of production so as to eliminate capitalism altogether.'<sup>588</sup> Dean's second reason for pitting identity politics against class thus invokes familiar metaphors of cultural superstructural recognition versus more fundamental economic relations of production.

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<sup>585</sup> I have much sympathy with Dean's (and Skeggs' {2003: 19-23}) rejection of *individualistic* neoliberal identity politics. For example 'lean in feminism' encourages a feminist subject who 'accepts full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care... increasingly predicated on crafting a felicitous work-family balance based on a cost-benefit calculus' (Rottenberg 2014: 1). 'Pull up your pants' race (and class) politics follows a similar responsabilising logic (see footnote 102 {p.40}). However, as argued, not all politics drawing on identities fits this mould.

<sup>586</sup> Dean (2012: 82).

<sup>587</sup> Dean (2006: 57).

<sup>588</sup> Dean (2006: 57-58).

For example, Dean states that the left, failing to confront capitalism, limited itself to 'small battles, policy options, and cultural interventions, victories that can be absorbed and defeats that can be forgotten.'<sup>589</sup> These victories can be absorbed because identity politics based on gender, race, or sexuality leave 'communicative capitalism's basic structure intact.'<sup>590</sup> Only the full inclusion of 'the people' is theorised as capable of 'distorting and disrupting' the capitalist order, not the full inclusion of women or people of colour.<sup>591</sup> Racism, then, is not part of capitalism's basic structure but part of its cultural superstructure. Hence struggles around raced identity – struggles whose demands end at equal recognition due to their superstructural limitations – can be unthreateningly assimilated.

This argument about the superficiality of raced and gendered identity struggles strikes a warning bell that gets louder when Dean reveals the exact contours of her economy-culture cut. For example, 'labour unrest' counts as economic, but conflicts around 'abortion, pornography, busing, crime, affirmative action, and gay rights' are 'cultural.'<sup>592</sup> Anti-harassment law is understood as more problematically individualistic and less a matter of 'broad economic justice' than wage and pension law advances.<sup>593</sup>

Drawing the economy-culture cut this way – construing issues like crime as individualistic cultural conflicts, in contrast to collective economic organised labour struggles for wages and pensions – instantiates methodological whiteness. After all, the criminal justice system marks people of colour as 'criminals' and then engages 'in all the practices we supposedly left behind', including limiting access to a wage via employment discrimination, and to economic goods like housing, education, and

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<sup>589</sup> Dean (2016a: 25).

<sup>590</sup> Dean (2016b).

<sup>591</sup> Dean (2012: 80–82).

<sup>592</sup> Dean (2012: 63).

<sup>593</sup> Dean (2012: 44–45, 63).

food stamps.<sup>594</sup> While incarcerated, prisoners work for below minimum wage without the legal protections afforded to 'employees.'<sup>595</sup> The criminal justice system thus shapes the forms of exploitation and expropriation people of colour experience.

This cut also instantiates methodological maleness, given how criminalising abortion denies women control over their own reproductive capacities and workplace harassment limits women's access to a stable wage. By categorising these as an individualising, cultural issues, Dean reinforces the misguided representation of these practices as outside the basic structure of the economy. Sure, struggles around crime and abortion do not necessarily abolish capitalism. But nor does union organising for paid sick leave or unemployment support – actions which Dean does not hesitate to see as the people 'disciplining capital'.<sup>596</sup> Dean is right that 'not all feminist and antiracist struggles are necessarily progressive,' but this does not prove class is more 'fundamental' than race or gender;<sup>597</sup> not all apparently class-based struggles are necessarily progressive either.<sup>598</sup>

By assuming that capitalism's basic structure is unraced and ungendered, and thus that political organising along the lines of raced or gendered identities is 'cultural', Dean repeats some of Fraser's mistakes. Our legal definitions of 'work' and 'workers' are raced and gendered, producing gender- and race-specific forms of exploitation and expropriation. As argued, because the raced and gendered cultural representations that structure the capitalist economy are *both* cultural and economic, the battle Dean draws between 'cultural' politics based on gendered and raced

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<sup>594</sup> Alexander (2012: 2).

<sup>595</sup> Benms (2015).

<sup>596</sup> Dean (2012: 44). Defending his exclusion of race and gender from the logic of capital, Harvey (2015) similarly suggests anti-racist and feminist struggles could be 'brushed aside or... co-opted and absorbed as a minor irritation as opposed to a real game changer'. Manning (2015) persuasively unpicks this.

<sup>597</sup> Dean (2006: 59).

<sup>598</sup> e.g. Wrench (1989).

identities and class struggle based on relations of antagonistic capitalist exploitation and expropriation is misleadingly simplistic and unhelpful.<sup>599</sup>

Given this, it is unsurprising that the economy-culture dualism underlying Dean's view also struggles to make sense of the intersection of race and class. Take Dean's analysis of 2014-2015 riots in Ferguson and Baltimore. Dean writes that 'identity as an operator for politics is now itself fully saturated:' it allows for no more useful political work and is now only damaging, 'reducing the space of change to the individual' and encouraging solidarity-sapping calling out and shaming.<sup>600</sup> She thinks the most striking symptom of identity's saturation is the 'economic rupturing of identity categories, that is to say, the emergence of identities as themselves sites of class struggle' as seen in these riots.<sup>601</sup>

It is hard to tally her claims that identity does only damage with her acknowledgement of the radical challenge these riots presented to the economy's basic structure, for the riots happened under the banner of an unapologetically 'substantive' black identity. Her economy-culture dualism cannot make sense of struggles that are both economic and emerge along the lines of raced identity. Like Fraser, Dean seems to envisage 'cultural' identity politics and class struggle as mutually exclusive categories of analysis. And, like Fraser's, Dean's approach fails to make sense of a world in which important concepts, structures, and struggles are fundamentally both economic and cultural. Dean's 'new communism' therefore repeats some old mistakes.<sup>602</sup>

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<sup>599</sup> By casting political struggles around raced identities as toothlessly unthreatening to capitalism's basic structure, Dean also presents an over-broad caricature of such struggles' ambitions (see, e.g. Wilderson 2003). Jonathan Dean (2015: 245) convincingly argues that Jodi Dean's claim that 'only radical class politics aims at wiping out the other's socio-political role and function' is absurd.

<sup>600</sup> Dean (2016a: 256).

<sup>601</sup> Dean (2016a: 257).

<sup>602</sup> Jonathan Dean (2015) coins the term 'new communism' for Jodi Dean's theoretical current.

### 8.3. A Non-Dualist Proposal

*'It is unfair that foreigners come to this country illegitimately and steal our benefits, steal our services like the NHS and undermine the minimum wage by working.'* – John Reid (then Labour Home Secretary)<sup>603</sup>

Key to economy-culture dualism is the assumption that the categories of economy and culture divide the social into two mutually exclusive kinds. Giving up this dualism need not force us into monism, however – we need not think the concepts are interchangeable or collapse into one another. Between dualistic mutual exclusivity and monism lies a whole spectrum of non-dualist possibilities.

I now construct a non-dualist understanding of the economy. The economy, I argue, is an ideological objectification of particular practices and resources marked as of commensurable public value by dominant common sense. The imagined 'public' in question over-represents dominant groups, meaning the common-sense evaluations involved in demarcating 'the economy' likewise over-value their labour and interests. In this, I build on Wynter's suggestion that 'the economy' is a science of reproducing the conditions of life for a particular kind of person – a white, upper class man.<sup>604</sup> To end, I explore the implications of this for class versus identity debates.

#### 8.3.1. Theoretical Background

Co-constitutive racist representations and racist distributions structure our social practices and so come to constitute our social relations. Above, I suggested we single out one network of social relations which we objectify as the social structure, 'the

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<sup>603</sup> As quoted in BBC News (2007)

<sup>604</sup> Wynter (2003).



economy.’ To build on this, I adopt Sally Haslanger’s understanding of social structures as ‘theoretical entities, postulated to do work in a social theory’ which are constituted, to an important degree, by social relations.<sup>605</sup> Social relations are in turn constituted by social practices: patterns of co-ordinated behaviour that respond to social resources (broadly understood) as these resources are interpreted and shaped by cultural meanings.<sup>606</sup>

For example, in UK offices the practice of making tea responds to the resources of tea, coffee, etc. (culturally appropriate workplace drinks), and the time and labour involved in making these (culturally gendered female and ‘domestic’). This practice part-constitutes hierarchical social relations if women workers are always tasked with making tea for everyone in a meeting. This hierarchical social relation would then constitute part of ‘the patriarchy’ – a theoretical entity postulated by feminist theory to objectify gendered relations of domination.

The economy is a social structure in this sense – a theoretical entity that objectifies certain relations and the practices that constitute them, including the resources and cultural understandings involved in these practices. Critical theoretical entities like ‘the patriarchy’ or ‘white supremacy’ have proved enormously helpful in theorising and systematising sexism and racism (these helpful theoretical entities are Haslanger’s focus). In contrast, the theoretical entity ‘the economy’ does *harmful* ideological work. It shores up relations of domination and subordination by systematically overvaluing certain resources, labour, and lives and overlooking or devaluing others, while presenting as a transparent, neutral representation of reality.

It is controversial to call the economy a ‘social structure.’ Swanson thinks this label ‘theoretically untenable and politically debilitating insofar as it treats social practices

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<sup>605</sup> Haslanger (2016b: 114).

<sup>606</sup> Haslanger (2018: 245).

like capitalism as autonomous and relatively intractable structures and leaves their complexity and contingency under-theorized.’<sup>607</sup> However, the understanding of social structures adopted here is designed to defang such worries. Haslanger does not naturalise, fetishize, or ahistoricise social structures. They are understood as only as intractable as the social relations that constitute them – relations which are the contingent results of historical processes, neither unchanging nor necessarily uncontradictory.

Understanding the economy as an ideologically harmful objectification of a specific set of social relations undoes any separation of human subjects and practices from mysterious, ‘objective’ social structures.<sup>608</sup> This is an important step beyond the mere ‘addition’ of class and race: it frees us from unhelpful imaginaries that see class but not race as arising from an objective economic realm, setting class up as more objective than race’s supposedly subjective character. Just as the social system of white supremacy is constituted by the actions and relationships of human subjects (and their material frameworks), so too is the economy – no hierarchy of objectivity is suggested.

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<sup>607</sup> Swanson (2005: 89).

<sup>608</sup> I have found no contemporary political philosophical work describing the economy as a problematic objectification. The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (2013: 161) describes the economy as an objectification – I suspect that like me, Sahlins is inspired by cultural materialists like Raymond Williams; Williams (1977: 81) critiques orthodox Marxist understandings of the base/superstructure metaphor, writing that “‘the base’ has come to be considered virtually as an object.’

### 8.3.2. *Common-sense Conceptions of the Economy: What's the Harm?*

*Protecting our workers means reforming our system of legal immigration. The current, outdated system depresses wages for our poorest workers, and puts great pressure on taxpayers. – Donald Trump<sup>609</sup>*

*[O]ur immigration system is out of control. I know it, you know it: everyone knows it, including the terrorists and people smugglers who make a mockery of Britain's hospitality. In tomorrow's Britain - in Conservative Britain - immigration will be controlled and strictly limited. Some people say that's racist. It's not. It's common sense. – Michael Howard (then Leader of the Conservative Party)<sup>610</sup>*

Which practices – responding to which resources, and interpreted by what cultural meanings – constitute ‘the economy’, then? The term selects according to dominant common-sense evaluations of which practices are important to the production, distribution, or consumption of resources (including labour) of commensurable public value, and in what ways. The economy is therefore demarcated by three evaluations: first, which practices are significant to the production, distribution, or consumption of publicly valuable resources; second, which resources are of public, commensurable value; third, the kinds of value/disvalue these economic resources are understood to have. I now turn to how this economic/non-economic demarcation shores up relations of domination and subordination by systematically overvaluing certain practices, resources, and lives while devaluing others.

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<sup>609</sup> Trump (2017).

<sup>610</sup> Howard (2005); later in the same paragraph, he adds ‘It's our national health service - not a world health service.’ Similar sentiments flourished in the ‘Leave’ campaign, as illustrated by an online advert stating that ‘Britain's new border is with SYRIA and IRAQ – Click to save our NHS’ (Dugmore 2018).

First, note that on this approach the practices constituting ‘the economy’ will *always* have a cultural dimension. Like all social practices, economic practices rely on a cluster of concepts, beliefs, narratives, and attitudes which make them and the resources they involve intelligible to participants, and therefore allow for practices’ repetition. For example, market exchange practices rely on culturally specific concepts (price, ownership, etc.), beliefs (e.g. in the value of a currency) and narratives about what is appropriate to exchange with whom. You won’t get far trying to sell an 8-year-old a car; you could sell them a snack, but if you are that child’s parent you break the conventional bounds of this practice by doing so. Acknowledging the cultural dimension of economic practices lets us explore the culture and class specificity of their logic.<sup>611</sup>

Dominant conceptions of the economy centre practices of marketized exchange, understood as equal individuals with different bundles of resources and needs trading things of equivalent value according to pre-given utility curves. Inhabitants of this sphere are conceived as neoclassical *homo economicus*, a character so wilfully abstracted from social context that many economics textbooks start their reasoning from Robinson Crusoe.<sup>612</sup> On this understanding, the economy is primarily constituted by market exchanges (along with the practices of production and consumption that keep these exchanges ticking over) and by the resources accorded (a-cultural) financial value through these exchanges.

Left theorists correctly point out that this picture overemphasises *formally* equal exchange relations, overlooks relations of domination arising from differential

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<sup>611</sup> Wynter (2003: 282).

<sup>612</sup> E.g. Basov (2016: 51); Gottheil (2013: 2013); Jehle (2010: 226); Mankiw & Taylor (2006: 50); Musgrave & Kacapyr (2001: 23); Varian (2014: 628-9). For discussion of the raced and gendered dimension of these ‘Robinson Crusoe’ figures see Watson (2018) and Hewitson (2012). This dominant conception of the economy has many parallels with the individualised atomism and abstraction from social context that marks much responsibility-sensitive egalitarian theorising – habits of theorising I argued against in Chapters 3-6.

ownership of the means of production, and overvalues and naturalises marketized practices as at once efficient, fair, and neutral.<sup>613</sup> In these ways, this common-sense theoretical entity, 'the economy', helps shore up relations of classed domination.

Feminists correctly point out that it shores up gendered domination by devaluing (under-paid) or ignoring (unpaid) practices of care and reproductive labour. It portrays activity in the home as of private rather than public value, since it occurs outside markets and does not command a wage.<sup>614</sup> Furthermore, when the caring/mothering practices of working-class women are included in the economy, it is because they are seen as dangerously destructive of economic value; these women are portrayed as hyper-visual sites of public expense by dominant discourses which cast them as over-fecund 'trash'<sup>615</sup> and '*drains* on national resources'.<sup>616</sup>

Similarly, common-sense demarcations of the economy ignore and undervalue raced labour practices and cast people of colour as of potentially destructive economic

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<sup>613</sup> E.g. Marx (2008) writes that the sphere of marketized exchange is painted as one of freedom and equality: 'Freedom, because both buyer and seller of a commodity... are constrained only by their free will... Equality, because each enters into relation with the other... and they exchange equivalent for equivalent.' Within this sphere, 'in accordance with the pre-established harmony of things... [all] work together to their mutual advantage.' Against this, it might be argued that economists do not make ethical claims. E.g. it is commonly thought that rational choice theories only present 'innocuous formal constraints on choice behaviour (or preferences) while remaining neutral about any substantive issues' (Reiss 2017: 138). However, as Reiss (2017) persuasively argues, assumptions like those of rational choice theory tell us which features of a choice ought to matter to people; such grounding assumptions are not value-neutral. Similarly, Hausman & McPherson (2016) discuss the ethical positions implicit in an infamous World Bank memorandum by its chief economist on the economic case for exporting pollution to 'less developed countries'; as they argue, the memorandum's economics is 'saturated with ethics' (2016: 19). Furthermore, many politicians and political philosophers make overtly ethical claims about the moral properties of capitalist markets, contributing to the common-sense view Marx challenges. Take the following claims from Anderson: 'Capitalist business cycles tied the fortunes of everyone together' (2004a: 352); 'exchange on the basis of mutual self-interest can preserve the independence and dignity of both parties' (2004a: 352); market prices promote pro-social behaviour by 'orienting people to serve others' interests' (2008: 249); see also Tomasi (2013).

<sup>614</sup> Folbre (1991). This issue is analysed in Chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>615</sup> As quoted in Tyler (2008: 29).

<sup>616</sup> Hancock (2003: 44). See also Skeggs (2003: Chs 5-6).

disvalue. As we've seen, work practices raced non-white are overlooked and undervalued in cases like those of home-carers, prison workers, and immigration detainees, locking participants into relations of hyper-exploitation without basic legal protections. A particularly clear statement of this devaluation came when the UK Government excluded immigration detainees from minimum wage laws on the grounds that the minimum wage would not 'reflect the *true economic value* of the work likely to be carried out.'<sup>617</sup> As Bales and Mayblin point out, the immigration status of detainees determines the value of this work: 'they perform the same jobs as their citizen counterparts... at a rate of 13 per cent of the national minimum wage.'<sup>618</sup>

Relatedly, the bounds of the economy are drawn by calculations of commensurable public value based on a dominant whitewashed cultural representation of the public. Recall how a Supreme Court Justice defended home carers' non-worker status on the grounds that if these carers *were* covered by wage laws, millions would be unable to afford care, making denying them worker status in the public interest.<sup>619</sup> The value of legal protections and minimum wages for home carers do not figure as a relevant part of this calculation of public interest because the 'public' involved quietly excludes them.

Similarly, Brexit debates drew on and solidified a raced representation of 'the people.' Nationalist rhetoric – 'we want our country back' – represented 'a wilful whitening of class identities for racist ends' by political elites.<sup>620</sup> Just as the gendered public/private divide animates common-sense understandings of the economy, so too do racially exclusionary imaginaries of national communities. Such imaginaries animate a conception of 'public value' that quietly elides people of colour's labour and lives.

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<sup>617</sup> 'House of Commons Hansard Debates' (2005), my emphasis.

<sup>618</sup> Bales & Mayblin (2018: 200).

<sup>619</sup> Boris and Klein (2012: 8).

<sup>620</sup> Bhattacharyya (2017: 20).

Given this exclusion from the relevant imagined communities, it is perhaps unsurprising that when people of colour *are* included in the economy, it is often because they are presented as involved in practices that importantly threaten or destroy economic value. Despite much evidence refuting a connection between recent immigration and crime, British people remain convinced that recent immigrants – especially undocumented ones – represent a serious criminal threat.<sup>621</sup> This is one example of how people of colour are cast as endangering economic value. Media photo captions in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina describing black people as ‘looting’ but white people doing the same thing as ‘finding bread and soda’ evoke a similar logic.<sup>622</sup> Our black banker (from Chapter 7) who cannot get a taxi suffers the consequences of this, excluding him from equal economic participation.

Therefore, as commonly used, ‘the economy’ selects a group of practices according to dominant common-sense evaluations of which practices are important for the production, distribution, or consumption of resources of commensurable public value, and in what ways. These evaluations systematically overlook the labour and interests of people of colour, and when people of colour *are* included in ‘the economy’ they are often cast as active threats to economic value. The economy, then, is a theoretical entity whose terms and boundaries support the illusion that white people sustain the efficient production, distribution, and constructive consumption of things of value while people of colour drain or threaten such resources and practices. Its methods of picking out, valuing, and naturalising a certain network of practices help maintain raced (gendered, and classed) relations of domination.

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<sup>621</sup> Stansfield & Stone (2018: 604).

<sup>622</sup> Ralli (2005).

Designating a practice as ‘economic’ is therefore not an ‘ultimately arbitrary’ categorisation.<sup>623</sup> To be admitted into the category of the economic is to either have established your practice as one that produces, distributes, or consumes resources of a certain kind of public value, or to have it marked as threatening this value. This designation is not ontological, but it is performative and powerful: once a practice, person, or resource is seen as valuable/disvaluable in this way it has very real implications. For one thing, casting people of colour as not only less productive but as potential destroyers of economic value helps dehumanise them and results in (and justifies) their subjection to greater violence in the name of securing value. Let me take these in turn.

In our current moment, when to be human is to fit the mould of homo-economicus, it is unsurprising that we dehumanise those cast as dangerous to this achievement. The economic is intimately bound up with the contemporary category of the human; as Bhattacharyya puts it ‘something in the status of “worker” and perhaps “potential worker”... slides into the demarcation of the human under capitalism’.<sup>624</sup> This is unsurprising, perhaps, given the neoliberal creep of economization and the resultant increased subservience of imaginaries of non-economic value to the economy.<sup>625</sup>

With the dehumanisation of those deemed economic threats comes violence done in the name of securing economic value. So, when immigration detainee Jimmy Mubenga, already handcuffed, is killed by UK immigration guards on a crowded plane, we find that the guards sent dozens of racist messages like this one: ‘Fuck off and go home you *free-loading, benefit grabbing, kid producing, violent, non-English*

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<sup>623</sup> Contra Swanson (2005: 95).

<sup>624</sup> Bhattacharyya (2018: 65). See also Wynter (2003).

<sup>625</sup> For example, while Prime Minister, David Cameron said that prisoners made to work ‘will contribute to the UK economy and make reparation to society’ (Malik 2012); here, social value is straightforwardly reduced to economic value.



speaking cock suckers...'<sup>626</sup> Likewise, the unarmed child Trayvon Martin is killed for looking like a burglar to George Zimmerman, who saw him as one of those 'punks' who 'always get away.'<sup>627</sup> Martin's dark skin was enough to transform him, in Zimmerman's eyes, from an unarmed child into a dangerous threat to property; a threat which Zimmerman then took it upon himself to nullify. These violent actions are done, in part, in the name of securing 'the economy' – a set of practices which reproduce the conditions of life of a whitewashed public through exploitation, expropriation, and exclusion.

This understanding of the economy accords with Skeggs' argument that economic value and wider social values are 'always dialogic, dependent, and co-constituting.'<sup>628</sup> It recognises how contemporary racist moral and socio-political evaluations of people of colour cannot be untangled from their economic demonization and devaluation.<sup>629</sup> Common-sense economic evaluations of what practices importantly produce, distribute, or consume resources of commensurable public value are always also cultural, ethico-political evaluations.

### *8.3.3. Reformulating 'the Economy': Insights from Social Reproduction*

#### *Theory*

Economy-culture dualism still has many advocates across public and academic discourse – as the recent uptick in 'class vs. identity' explanations suggests. However, elsewhere moves towards theorising the co-constituting relations of class, gender, and race are gaining ground, as evidenced by the recent resurgent interest in

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<sup>626</sup> Lowenstein (2015).

<sup>627</sup> Yankah (2013).

<sup>628</sup> Skeggs (2014: 1).

<sup>629</sup> I say 'contemporary' because during periods of slavery, racist socio-political appraisals of black people (as sub-human) were coupled with different economic understandings of them (as valuable property, almost like livestock – see Harris {1993: 1719-1720}).

social reproduction theory.<sup>630</sup> To end, I explain how social reproduction approaches aid escape from the class versus identity impasse, and how the non-dualist conception of the economy outlined above harmonises with and builds on such approaches.

The cornerstone of social reproduction theory is an expanded conception of labour integrating 'reproductive' and 'productive' work. For example, Camfield understands labour as 'conscious, meaning-saturated activity through which embodied subjects relate to each other and the rest of nature and in so doing produce and reproduce the social.'<sup>631</sup> Befitting its marxist feminist origins, caring practices – paid or unpaid – are central exemplars of labour on this approach. This widening of the category of work reveals the threads of hyper-exploitation and expropriation running through the experiences of home care workers, prison laborers, immigration detainees, as well as women denied control over their own reproductive labour or subjected to sexual harassment to secure a wage.

This framework lets us talk of certain relations as both capitalist and racist; no 'pure' capitalist economic logic is sought beyond or behind the practices that form and maintain capitalist social relations. In this way, social reproduction theory offers important resources for escaping the class vs. identity dead end. For it lets us conceive of these practices of hyper-exploitation and expropriation as raced and

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<sup>630</sup> E.g. Bhattacharya (2017); Bhattacharyya (2018); Camfield (2016); Fraser *et al.* (2018). Overlapping on some fronts (e.g. Bhattacharyya 2018) there is also renewed interest in theorising 'racial capitalism' rather than theorising race and capitalism separately. For example, the introduction to a recent special issue of *New Political Economy* on raced markets begins with Fanon's famous quote, '[T]he economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich' (quoted in Tilley & Shilliam 2017: 1). Virdee (2019) recently gave The Sociological Review's Annual Lecture on racial capitalism, commented on by Skeggs (2019) and Valluvan (2019).

<sup>631</sup> Camfield (2016: 300).

gendered but also importantly *classed* forms of domination, helping undo the pitting of raced and gendered ‘identities’ against class.<sup>632,633</sup>

However, an expanded conception of work alone is not enough to dissolve class versus identity debates. Recall the dehumanising violence done to those deemed outside the economy, and their ongoing exclusion; these ‘spaces of death may not present opportunities for accumulation in any straightforward sense.’<sup>634</sup> To make visible the classed dimension of *these* practices we must return to the exclusionary nature of dominant conceptions of the ‘public’ which animate the economy, as argued for above.

These violent exclusions – done in the name of protecting a whitewashed ‘public’ – can therefore be understood as, at least in part, a defensive shoring up of current class hierarchies, either by elites wanting to deflect working-class anger towards raced outsiders, or by those who feel it the only way to protect their limited access to the means of sustaining life. Both suggest the urgent necessity of a strong intersectional class politics, lest people of colour are left to bear the brunt of class pain mis-directed into ethno-nationalist anger.

In his attempt to theorise gender, race, and class together, Camfield rejects a focus on common-sense understandings of the economy in favour of a focus on ‘the social relations involved in processes of producing the means of human life.’<sup>635</sup> Building on

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<sup>632</sup> So long as class domination includes relations of expropriation and exploitation, as both Fraser (at least in later work, e.g. 2016) and Dean (2012) agree it should.

<sup>633</sup> Fraser’s latest paper in fact accords with some of these ideas. Co-authored with two social reproduction theorists, it abandons recognition vs. redistribution language and any dualistic zero-sum weighing of culture and economy. They aim to be ‘right in the thick of... [class struggle] even as we are helping to redefine it in a new, more capacious way’ (Fraser *et al.* 2018: 119). Fraser might have been hugely influential in outlining economy-culture dualism but this latest shift adds her considerable intellectual weight to the ranks of a more productive approach.

<sup>634</sup> Bhattacharyya (2018: 20).

<sup>635</sup> Camfield (2016: 293); see also Bhattacharyya (2018: 52).

this, just as social reproduction theorists' suggest counter-hegemonic understandings of work we might likewise suggest a counter-hegemonic understanding of the economy: one animated by an expanded conception of labour as those practices significant to the production, reproduction, distribution, and consumption of the means of life, which understands resources' public value as stemming from their ability to sustain life, and which conceives of the public in question through an imagined community free from raced exclusions.

One consequence of this approach is that class struggles can take forms that might surprise us – like the riots in Ferguson, Missouri, and Baltimore. More generally, anti-racist struggles express working class needs to the extent that they organise around issues and demands which serve working class interests, where this 'working class' includes those subjected to expropriation and exclusion from the means of reproducing life as well as those subjected to waged exploitation.<sup>636</sup> And class struggles express anti-racist needs to the extent that they organise around issues and demands serving the interests of people of colour, rather than focusing on an over-narrow, raced conception of the constitutive injustice they suffer confined to traditional waged exploitation.<sup>637</sup>

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<sup>636</sup> As Skeggs (2003) argues, the category of the 'working class' has never been a pre-given, neutral term but rather emerges and shifts as the result of historical political struggle. Because of this, and because Skeggs theorises class as always mutually constructed by categories of race, sexuality, and gender, her approach to class is particularly well suited to an intersectional project like that advanced here. Skeggs does not use the concept of intersectionality, however, and has voiced scepticism about the intersectional paradigm in the past. She criticised intersectionality for being 'reductive' in setting up equivalences between race, gender, and class (as quoted in Gressgård 2008: 28), and for being an empty gesture 'producing nothing but a statement of no-intent' (Skeggs 2019: 29). Regarding the first criticism, many key intersectional theorists push against any such 'flattening' equivalences (for a summary of this debate within intersectional currents of thought, see Cooper {2016: 394-395}). As for the second critique, Skeggs (2019: 29) goes on to praise the 'story of force, logics and entanglement, including the violence performed by categorization' captured by Virdee's (2019) account of racial capitalism; this suggests her open to certain forms of intersectional approaches at least.

<sup>637</sup> Understanding the constitutive injustice of class to be traditional waged exploitation is raced since access to formal waged employment is, itself, raced: people of colour are more likely to be shut out of formal employment altogether (e.g. Li 2014) and more likely to work in conditions

It is certainly true that individualist, neoliberal anti-racist ‘solutions’ and campaigns will not have a classed component to them – and should be rejected as inadequate for this reason. For example, Obama telling black men to ‘make better choices’ contributes nothing to class struggle, as does the responsibilising ‘pull up your pants’ thread of race politics it reproduces.<sup>638</sup> Similarly, telling women to ‘lean in’ is problematically silent on issues of class.<sup>639</sup> But (as argued in Chapter 2) these approaches shift responsibility for flourishing onto the individual, notwithstanding that patriarchal, white supremacist, and/or class structures can make such flourishing nigh-on impossible to achieve through individuals ‘leaning in’/‘choosing well.’ As such these responsibilising modes of politics likewise contribute little, if anything, to feminist and anti-racist struggles.

To end this section, and to explore this expanded conception of the economy, I now assess it against Cameron and Gibson-Graham’s critiques of feminist approaches to the economy. These theorists criticise feminist political economists for merely ‘adding on’ or ‘counting in’ certain sectors to the economy (such as unpaid carework), while leaving intact the myth of the economy as a self-contained, transparent, and naturally pre-given sphere, the contents of which can be easily and neutrally measured.<sup>640</sup> Such approaches, they argue, do not necessarily force us to think differently about the economy. For example, the neoliberal economist Gary Becker’s inclusion of the household in the economy does nothing to politicise the economy as a whole or unpaid carework specifically. Furthermore, the ‘added in’ sector is still theorised as both separate from the rest of the economy and as of subordinate importance.

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where, as discussed, their status as proper waged workers is denied (e.g. doing home care work or working in detention centres and prisons).

<sup>638</sup> Coates (2013) - see footnote 102 (p.40) for other examples.

<sup>639</sup> Sandberg (2013).

<sup>640</sup> Cameron & Gibson-Graham (2003).

Cameron and Gibson-Graham's alternative solution has two main parts. First, they advocate understanding the economy as a 'discursive construct.'<sup>641</sup> On this, we agree – my argument for understanding the economy as a theoretical entity follows a very similar line of thought. Second, they advocate for reconceiving the economy as empty of any essential identity, logic, or organising principle; rather, it should be understood, they suggest, as an open-ended, pluralistic construct. To explain what they mean by this, they give the example of child-care, stating that 'the diversity of economic relations that currently characterise childcare-giving reflects the unparalleled success of a transformative feminist economic project which has multiplied the options for how women and men raise children in our society.'<sup>642</sup>

This second move advances a vision of a pluralist economy at too great a cost to substantive critique. My approach differs from theirs here, by insisting that most women are still severely constrained in their childcare options by patriarchal, classed, and raced economic practices, even if some have multiple formal options open to them.<sup>643</sup> Throughout this chapter and the last, I have suggested that the economy, as a harmful ideological entity and the practices and resources that comprise it, *are* organised in ways that systematically uphold white supremacy. The relations that importantly determine who gets what care, clean air, wages, and healthy food, are also, to a significant extent, relations that reproduce and reinforce white privilege.<sup>644</sup>

Though in this I depart from Cameron and Gibson-Graham, my approach does not simply 'add on' sectors here and there, leaving our overarching conception of the

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<sup>641</sup> Cameron & Gibson-Graham (2003: 145).

<sup>642</sup> Cameron & Gibson-Graham (2003: 153).

<sup>643</sup> See, e.g. Cain (2016: 496); Grabham & Smith (2010); Lloyd & Penn (2014).

<sup>644</sup> In London, for example, poor and black communities disproportionately suffer illegal levels of air pollution (London City Hall 2016, 2019). For discussion of the availability of healthy food and race, see Chapter 2, Section 4.

economy intact. Rather, it necessitates a fundamental reconception of the logics through which we draw ‘the economy.’ This is because it changes the metrics by which we decide which practices are deemed significant and which resources deemed valuable/disvaluable to what public, and why. Rejecting the notion of life in service to financial value, the counter-hegemonic reconception suggested here puts the economy in service to life.<sup>645</sup> It invites anti-racist, feminist, and socialist rethinkings of labour and public value, and recognises the need to connect these to concurrent rethinkings of the category of the human.

#### 8.4. Relational Egalitarian Implications

*Material rationality is thus a representation in monetary terms of a subjacent set of meaningful relationships among persons and the objects of their existence. – Marshall Sahlins<sup>646</sup>*

In Chapter 6 I argued that the place and significance of economic distributions was not always clear within relational egalitarian currents of thought. While both Anderson and Schemmel agreed that distributions mattered insofar as they affected equal relations and statuses, there was disagreement over to what extent distributions did affect equal relations and why. Furthermore, the sufficientarianism of Anderson’s early work led to some conservative economic-distributive moments where she theorised socio-political status as, to a large degree, independent of economic distributions.

To end this chapter, therefore, I briefly explore two implications of the arguments of Chapters 7 and 8 for relational egalitarian theorising about distributive justice. First,

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<sup>645</sup> Bhattacharyya (2018: 39-70).

<sup>646</sup> Sahlins (2013: 170).

I argue that the relational need to integrate the demands of equal recognition with those of equal distribution must go beyond perspectival dualism to theorise patterns of recognition and distribution as importantly co-constitutive. Second, I argue that critical work on the co-constitution of race and goods like money and property suggests ways to theorise economic-distributive goods in more relational ways. The topics involved are large, however; the remarks that follow are only initial thoughts.

Anderson is clear that economic distributions matter for equal social relations, but only instrumentally; unequal distributions are problematic only if and insofar as they threaten to cause, are caused by, or embody unequal political relations.<sup>647</sup> I do not dispute this. Rather, in Chapter 6 I questioned Anderson's assumption that economic distributions are at least partly uncoupled from socio-political status hierarchies. For example: she uncouples wages from 'social appreciation', arguing that low-waged workers warrant more social appreciation but only moderate minimum wage increases; the accumulation of 'vast fortunes' are fine as long as they are accompanied by generous social insurance programmes; differences in market-based 'success pay' do not threaten equal relations since they 'apply only at the enterprise level, not that of the basic structure'; and exploitation is to be understood without reference to distributive issues.<sup>648</sup> The arguments of Chapters 7 and 8 can help highlight problems with this approach and suggest alternatives.

What does it mean for relational approaches to distributive justice that economic practices constitute economic relations, and that economic relations co-constitute wider relations of political status and socio-political understandings and values? First, it is worth emphasising that co-constitution is not determination: I am not proposing a form of economic determinism whereby the egalitarianism (or

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<sup>647</sup> Anderson (2008: 263, 267; 1999: 326).

<sup>648</sup> Anderson (1999: 325; 2008: 256; 2008: 253; 2010:13). For a fuller discussion of Anderson's early work on relational egalitarianism see Chapter 6, Section 3.



inegalitarianism) of *economic* relations fully determines whether egalitarian political relations manifest. Rather, I have argued that these economic relations are inseparable from wider political and ‘cultural’ relations because they importantly constitute them – and are constituted by them in turn.

Putting this in Anderson’s own terms, we have our first relational egalitarian lesson: the economic relations which make up society’s ‘enterprise level’ cannot and should not be separated from society’s ‘basic structure’.<sup>649</sup> Wage differentials within the enterprise level, for example, are always informed by and inform wider political identities and hierarchies of social status. Economic value and wider socio-political values are always in dialogue with one another.

Like Perspectival Dualism, Anderson’s understanding artificially separates economic practices and distributions from socio-political recognition and status in ways unhelpful for understanding the reproduction of socio-political hierarchies of race, gender, and class. The arguments of the last two chapters show the importance of recognising that economic value co-constitutes social and political values: low wage levels, for example, are often closely associated with labour practices *tainted* by their association with women, people of colour, and the working classes. As with the case of UK immigration detainees, their political status – specifically their hyper-vulnerability and their raced identity – cannot be untangled from the value of their labour at the ‘enterprise level’.

By calling for an attitudinal-recognitive change - greater ‘appreciation’ for such labour without substantive accompanying change in practices of labouring and reward, early Anderson overlooks how social attitudes are not simply voluntary decisions or educational gaps – matters of just reminding ourselves to show more

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<sup>649</sup> Cf. Anderson, 2008: 253. I first discuss this claim in Chapter 6, Section 3.

appreciation for low-wage workers. Rather, these attitudes arise from social contexts marked by unequal access to the means of life – contexts of unequal access that both *legitimise* and *are legitimised by* certain cultural-ideological understandings, attitudes, and statuses.

Unequal economic distributions legitimise certain cultural understandings because such distributions are not only end points; unequal distributions of wealth and employment, for example, are also the starting point for many socio-political stories about which people are worthy of respect and which are not, and about who ‘contributes’ and who ‘takes advantage’.<sup>650</sup> These distributions of economic resources relate to these cultural understandings in ways similar to how the matter of a statue relates to its form: these distributions constitute part of the ‘matter’ which helps give rise to particular ideological ‘forms’ – our raced, gendered, and classed stories of social respectability and standing.<sup>651</sup>

Given this, talking about changing attitudes towards low-wage workers without changing the practices of waged reward underlying these attitudes is the political-economic equivalent of ‘thoughts and prayers’: certainly better than nothing, it recognises a problem and regrets its existence, but it does not substantively interrupt some of the mechanisms central to reproducing classed, raced, and gendered hierarchies of social standing.

Interesting further relational egalitarian work could be done investigating how the practices important to the production, distribution, and consumption of the means of

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<sup>650</sup> I have argued this with respect to race (Chapter 7); see Skeggs (1997) for a compelling argument of the centrality of ‘respectability’ to class and gender.

<sup>651</sup> See Haslanger (2012b: 463-464). Haslanger (2016a) calls herself a ‘moderate materialist’; cf. Anderson (2018 - Q&A), who states that she is not a materialist because ‘ideas matter.’ However, as my arguments suggest, it is important to recognise that material structures, economic distributions, and cultural representations, affects, and ideas *all* matter – we need not and should not choose only one.

life shape, and are shaped by, socio-political identities, power hierarchies, and political statuses – and exploring how alternative, more egalitarian economic practices might be possible. I suspect (though it would take far more work to show) that these investigations would lead to far more ambitious relational egalitarian distributive programme than small minimum wage increases and maternity benefits.<sup>652</sup>

Furthermore, if my arguments are right, such a programme would need to be broader as well as deeper: it could not be confined to changing the conditions of waged work and narrow social benefits enabling parental care for the very young. Rather, on the counter-hegemonic understanding of the economy suggested above it would need to range far further afield, demanding reformed economic practices around, as Bhattacharyya puts it, ‘not only housework but also water. Not only care but also air.’<sup>653</sup>

In sum, then, if relational egalitarianism is to ‘integrate the demands of equal recognition with those of equal distribution’ as Anderson rightly wants it to, then it must go beyond perspectival dualism – it must theorise patterns of recognition and distribution as importantly co-constitutive.<sup>654</sup>

Second, insights by critical race theorists on the mutual histories of making race and making property open new ways of conceptualising economic-distributive goods, suggesting that certain goods are better understood in relational terms. Take Cheryl Harris’ argument that US law continues to protect ‘whiteness as property’ – whiteness as a status on the basis of which social benefits are allocated.<sup>655</sup> This

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<sup>652</sup> Cf. early Anderson’s (1999) foundational articulation of relational egalitarianism.

<sup>653</sup> Bhattacharyya (2018: 61).

<sup>654</sup> Anderson (1999: 314).

<sup>655</sup> Harris (1993). I draw on and discuss this argument in Chapter 7, Section 3.3.

argument (and similar ones invoking the ‘wages of whiteness’<sup>656</sup>) are not meant to flatten the relationality of race into dead, individualised distributions of some mysterious stuff, ‘whiteness’. Rather, by likening whiteness to a kind of ‘status property’ and by insisting that ‘racial identity and property are deeply interrelated concepts’, they call on us to rethink distributions of money and property in terms other than that of static, individualised distributions.<sup>657</sup> Given the relationality of race, they suggest a corresponding relationality of property and financial goods.

Understanding distributions of financial wealth as relational is firmly within the bounds of contemporary economic theory. The ‘credit theory of money’, which views money as a credit relationship, is one of the preeminent contemporary theorisations of money.<sup>658</sup> Some theorists suggest that money is constituted by social relations of credit-debt, or ‘the promise to pay’, for example; while agreeing that money is a social relation, others focus on relations among commodity owners engaging in exchange – relations through which money comes to monopolise the ability to exchange directly (i.e. to ‘buy’).<sup>659</sup>

Distributions of property, too, can be viewed through this relational lens. The distribution of cars, for example, is not like the distribution of stars in the sky – the former represents a specific social network of rights which stipulate which people hold what kinds of control over which cars, and which people are denied access to them. These property relations are, in turn, constituted by legal practices of conventional ownership, and political-legal-economic practices of criminalising certain transgressions of these norms, among others. Thus, as David Graeber puts it, ‘the way economists talk about “goods and services” already involves reducing what

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<sup>656</sup> Roediger (1999) who takes the term from Du Bois (1999).

<sup>657</sup> Harris (1993: 1714, 1709).

<sup>658</sup> For an overview see de Bruin *et al.* (2018).

<sup>659</sup> Ingham (2001) argues for the former view, Lapavistas (2005) for the latter.

are really social relations to objects.’<sup>660</sup> This approach opens further avenues for relational egalitarian investigation of traditional distributive issues.

It also offers a way to square some puzzling tensions in work that could provide a valuable foundation for these investigations. For example, Iris Marion Young’s writings are a valuable source for egalitarian work on exploitation.<sup>661</sup> Yet Young argues that money is not a form of power but rather a resource – ‘a kind of stuff possessed by individual agents in greater or lesser amounts.’<sup>662</sup> For Young, money is not a relational good but a divisible thing possessed by individuals.

However, Young’s insights into capitalist exploitation and unequal power relations stand in some tension with this theorisation of money. For example, she suggests we understand exploitation through structural power relations. She writes that ‘through private ownership of the means of production, and through markets that allocate labour *and the ability to buy goods*, capitalism systematically transfers the powers of some persons to others, thereby augmenting the power of the latter.’<sup>663</sup> The problem with this is that the social relations governing the ‘ability to buy goods’, as Young puts it, sounds a lot like the distribution of money. Understanding money in relational terms allows us to explain how money is ‘a primary medium of power’ in contemporary capitalist societies in a way in which Young’s non-relational understanding of it struggles to capture.<sup>664</sup>

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<sup>660</sup> Graeber (2001: 9)

<sup>661</sup> Cf. Anderson (2010: 13) who thinks understanding exploitation relationally requires doing away with the involvement of money and economic distributions. For discussion see Chapter 6, Section 2.2.

<sup>662</sup> Young (2011a: 31).

<sup>663</sup> Young (2011a: 49) – my emphasis.

<sup>664</sup> Fraser (2014: 62). Such an approach could also explain, in ways that Young’s (2011a: 15-38) wariness of the distributive paradigm make difficult, why accounts of race drawing on distributive metaphors are not necessarily politically regressive: the ‘wages of whiteness’ or ‘whiteness as property’ for example. In such work, distributive metaphors illuminate the relative stability of unequal power relations along raced lines and, as argued above, need not be read as

Anderson's recent work *has* in fact turned somewhat towards the two directions I have just flagged as promising. First, she has begun to theorise how unequal economic distributions relate to unequal socio-political relations: in her book on racial segregation she explores (among other things) why 'inequalities in material resources' as well as inequalities of 'rights, privilege, power, and esteem typically track social group identities.'<sup>665</sup> Though the specificities of her answers do not always accord with my arguments in Chapters 7 and 8, this is a welcome and exciting development.<sup>666</sup>

And, though Anderson has not yet theorised economic goods like money in relational terms, in her latest published work she acknowledges that the 'the amount of respect, standing, and autonomy... [workers] get is roughly proportional to their market value.'<sup>667</sup> This suggests recognition of the important connections between distributive goods and socio-political power relations. As one of the most influential contemporary theorists of egalitarianism, her moves in this direction are sure to advance these conversations within political philosophy.

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attempts to individualise distributions of money and property into socially inert, static piles of 'stuff'.

<sup>665</sup> Anderson (2010: 11).

<sup>666</sup> My main differences with Anderson (2010) are threefold. On my disagreement with her attempt to strip the concept of 'exploitation' of its distributive dimension, see Chapter 6, Section 2. Second, though in this work Anderson similarly argues that social relations are constituted by social 'processes of interaction' (e.g. 2010: 16), she calls special attention to segregation as a 'principle' or 'fundamental cause' of group inequality (2010: 2). I am unsure of the status of this 'fundamentality claim' (for critical discussion see Shelby 2014: 260-263). Third, Anderson (2010: 18) writes that certain distributions embody unequal relations, while others cause unequal relations; I do not rely on such a distinction as I am not clear on how Anderson intends us to draw this line. Nonetheless, on other points my work is compatible with Anderson (2010); in particular, Anderson similarly argues that social relations are constituted by social practices (2010: 17).

<sup>667</sup> Anderson (2019: 138).

## 8.5. Conclusion: A Different Approach to Economic-Distributive Issues

We urgently need intersectional analyses that insist on the irreducible intermingling of race, class, and gender; with inequality intensifying and fractures appearing along overtly raced lines, we lack the luxury of rehearsing another decade of identity versus class debates. As my analysis of Jodi Dean's work suggests, contemporary iterations of these debates remain underlain by economy-culture dualisms which instantiate methodological whiteness and struggle to analyse the intersections of race and class.

In place of these dualisms, I proposed an analysis of the economy as a harmful ideological objectification of certain practices, selected for their supposed importance to the production, distribution, and consumption of resources of commensurable public value. The theoretical entity, 'the economy', does harmful social theoretical work, shoring up and naturalising raced, classed, and gendered relations of domination. This economy is importantly structured by both cultural concepts, meanings, and understandings, and by material and immaterial resources and distributions. I suggested that social reproduction theory can help dissolve class versus identity debates and used insights from this theoretical current to inform a counter-hegemonic understanding of the economy – one which, among other things, calls on us to properly recognise the lives and labour of people of colour.

Finally, I explored the implications of this for relational egalitarian approaches to economic-distributive issues. Relational egalitarians should re-attach economic-distributive patterns and practices to issues of socio-political status hierarchies and power differentials, I argued. One of the ways this re-attachment might work is by thinking about certain economic goods (money and property in particular) in more thoroughly relational terms. At first glance, economic-distributive issues can seem to

concern the division of static, inert 'stuff' between individual agents; rather than accept this framing, we can look under its hood to investigate the relational bases of such divisions.

Jodi Dean is right that we need to take class injustices extremely seriously, just as responsibility-sensitive egalitarians are right about the political importance of distributive justice. But recognising this need not come at the cost of neglecting issues of race or gender, nor by abstracting away 'culture'. Anderson is right that we need to focus on equal political relations – but we cannot do this by looking to issues of recognition or norms of 'social appreciation' alone.

By combining cultural understandings and distributions in the idea of an economic practice, and by calling attention to how economic relations always affect, and are affected by, wider social and moral relations, we can better hold all the pieces of this puzzle together. Doing so begins to demystify the economy in ways that can help us to re-integrate distributive justice within egalitarian thought.



## 9. CONCLUSION

I aimed to formulate an egalitarian approach to distributive justice appropriate for tackling injustices of race, gender, and class. As so much public political argument and liberal egalitarian theorising about distributive justice starts from the idea of choice, I began there too. I suggested that the strong symbolic value accorded to our equality as active choosers was closely entangled with ideas of the national good and the economy.

The spiralling effects of choice – where distributive outcomes are understood as ‘chosen’ and thus come to represent certain groups in certain ways – illustrate how choice functions as an important mediating bridge between political distributions and representations. Real-world political choice-discourses function as an effective smokescreen for structural injustices, encouraging us to chalk them up to bad choices/actions of disadvantaged groups rather than to racist, sexist, or classist social structures.

Why is the concept of choice able to play this inegalitarian role so well? Stuart Hall argues that ideologies ‘work most effectively when we are not aware that how we formulate and construct a statement about the world is underpinned by ideological premises.’<sup>668</sup> So it is with political appeals to choice/agent responsibility: underneath the innocuous common-sense veneer of statements about which agents choose what outcomes lie complicated tangles of normative political judgements. These are hidden by choice-statements’ deceptively simple framing: our intuitive selection of

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<sup>668</sup> Hall (2002: 19).

agents; the maps of actual social causation guiding our sense of which actions matter for producing which outcomes; and our corresponding sense of reasonable foreseeability.

The assumption that choice statements express only descriptive (perhaps metaphysically puzzling) statements about the world is part of what makes them so tempting; their apparent apolitical nature gives us a sense that we base our arguments on solid foundations rather than on messy, disputed, value-laden politics. But the politics that sneaks in unnoticed is too often sexist, classist, and racist. Therefore, it is worth egalitarian theorists who want to use these concepts taking time to investigate contemporary mechanisms of structural injustice.

Furthermore, rather than focusing on cases where we adjudicate between two needy individuals, I suggested we refocus critical attention on discovering which social practices matter most for the reproduction of raced, gendered, and classed inequalities (of status, power, and resources). Doing so ensures we set the right egalitarian priorities: widespread problematic social practices rather than individual mistakes or adjudication between the ‘deserving and undeserving’ poor. This shift requires moving far beyond the theoretical tools of choice and agent responsibility – and therefore beyond the confines of responsibility-sensitive egalitarian thought.

Relational egalitarianism looks a prime alternative, given its less individualistic, more structural approach, and its acknowledgement of the politics of socio-political representation and status. Yet Elizabeth Anderson’s repudiation of a focus on choice came, at times, with an underemphasis of the political significance of distributive issues. Even if distributions matter only insofar as they bear on political relations of equality, we still need to know to what extent they actually do bear on such relations; gaps and puzzles remain in relational egalitarian answers to this.

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Nancy Fraser's perspectival dualism is a rich resource for egalitarian investigations of these puzzles. However, problems remain in perspectival dualism's handling of economic-distributive issues. The theory's residual economy-culture dualism means it struggles to theorise the spiralling distribution-representation loops so important to contemporary racism, sexism, and classism. The practices that make up the economy are just as reliant on and structured by cultural meanings, representations, narratives, and concepts as the practices of any other sphere of life.

To move beyond the problems of economy-culture dualism, I suggested that the term, 'the economy' picks out and groups together certain social practices and then objectifies this group as a thing. A practice is commonly counted as economic if dominant views understand it to be important to the production, distribution, or consumption of things of public commensurable value. But these dominant logics by which practices' importance and resources' public value are determined are not gender-, race-, or class-neutral.

How to discuss economic-distributive justice, then, without framing the issue in ways which reproduce raced (/gendered/classed) ideas about what practices, resources, and lives are of public value? Here, ideas from social reproduction theory can help inform a counter-hegemonic understanding of the economy by, first, expanding our concept of labour to integrate productive and reproductive work. And, second, by insisting that the economy must serve the life of all members of society, rather than lives and wellbeing sacrificed in service to the economy. On this basis, I suggested an alternative understanding which groups together all those practices important to the (re)production, distribution, and consumption of the means of life.

This redefinition is designed to work with and facilitate two further steps: First, to make room for reforms to our economic evaluative practices so as to recognise the

importance of people of colour's, women's, and working-class peoples' labour to the production and reproduction of the means of life. Second, to encourage the formulation of a racially-inclusive 'public' to shape evaluations of what – and who – count in imaginaries of public value. This analysis does not merely 'count in' or 'add on' bits to the economy but aims to facilitate the reformulation of its fundamental animating logics.

This work has implications for relational egalitarian theorisations of distributive justice. First, to fully integrate the demands of recognitive and distributive justice within a relational egalitarian framework, we ought to theorise them together rather than through a dualist lens. And second, it suggests ways to theorise certain economic-distributive goods like money and property in more relational terms: not as static, socially-inert piles of 'stuff' held by individuals but as representations of an underlying set of socio-political relationships among people and 'the objects of their existence.'<sup>669</sup>

### ***Thematic Contributions***

#### *(i) Rethinking Choice*

Relative to how often political philosophers draw on the concept of choice, they have scarcely investigated how it functions in unequal social contexts.<sup>670</sup> To remedy this, I built on feminist work to show its central relevance to issues of neoliberal responsibilisation on terrains of race and class as well as gender. I explain how choice has successfully functioned as a conceptual trojan horse, bringing conservative and inegalitarian norms into prominent strands of egalitarianism. If a concept of agent responsibility is to have a place in egalitarian thought – to help outline feminist, anti-racist, and left theorisations of socio-political productivity and

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<sup>669</sup> Sahlin (2013: 170).

<sup>670</sup> Feminist political theorists provide important exceptions here (e.g. Bartky, 1988; Chambers, 2010).

## 9. CONCLUSION

exploitation, for example – it should be carefully decoupled from its individualist and inegalitarian histories of commonplace use.

### *(ii) Rethinking Distributive Justice*

The topic of distributive justice is often approached through the use of idealised thought experiments light on social context and heavy on individualistic assumptions. But this topic must not be siloed from issues of recognitive, epistemic, or cultural justice (nor from debates about political-philosophical methodologies and ontologies). Similarly, a focus on fostering equal political relationships need not exclude or minimise distributive issues. Socio-political relationships are constituted through social practices and an important subset of these practices are economic-distributive (on both the dominant and my alternative understanding of this label). Recognising this opens relational egalitarian ways to confront conservative naturalisations and depoliticisations of the economic realm.

Critical theorists like Fraser and Jodi Dean talk about the economy as if this label needs little explanation. However, unequal power relations shape the concept of the economy and its division from the non-economic – a performative divide with extremely harmful consequences for those relegated to the wrong side. My definition of the economy does not restrict the term to markets nor legitimise economic practices and distributions as natural outcomes of individual free choice arising from pre-political indifference curves.

Centring the notion of an economic practice helps overcome distributive-recognitive dualisms. Economic practices have both distributive and cultural aspects, but these aspects are best understood holistically: the distributive patterns that result from these practices are comprehended and reproduced via cultural meanings, values, narratives and concepts. And economic distributions, understood as always both an

end point and a starting point for the next round of economic practices, are something like river-bed landscapes – they help illustrate the direction, power, and flow of past currents of thought and action and influence the direction, power, and flow of future currents too (though they do not determine them). This approach helps dissolve any simplistic pitting of identity politics against class, for economic-distributive issues importantly shape political identity formations and vice versa.

*(iii) Classic Feminist Problems; New applications*

Debates about carework and productive labour, the line between public and private, the androcentricity of key political concepts, and the responsibilities of the state as a collective political agent can seem outdated: more relevant to times when women were stuck in the home without a wage and before decades of neoliberal reforms had eroded the idea of collective goods provision.

Granted, the public-private divide has mutated in recent decades, as neoliberalism has (re)privatised and (re)commodified some of the public services created by 20<sup>th</sup> century welfare states. This wearing down and wearing out of unconditional public services (along with women's entrance into the paid workforce) has changed how the divide operates but not decreased its political significance. The case of low-paid and unpaid carework illustrates how dynamics of race, gender, and class still rely on problematic divisions (and gradations) between public/productive and private/unproductive activity.

Analyses of carework can also serve as a gateway into a host of other urgent questions. As Bhattacharyya argues, 'in the division between productive economy and natural resources, the labour of those subordinated by race or gender can be transformed into the stuff of nature.'<sup>671</sup> This 'naturing' of work done by people of

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<sup>671</sup> Bhattacharyya (2018: 46).

## 9. CONCLUSION

colour and women is not a new story: it has long gone in hand with their representation as somehow slightly less human, less rational. Like those who perform feminized, racialised labour, nature's capacity to support life and renew itself is taken as merely part of the causal background of human endeavours, not recognised as an actual cause of our achievements.<sup>672</sup> Recognising this reveals potential connections between the politics of ecological crisis and the politics of reproductive crises – of carework, teaching, health, education, and so on.<sup>673</sup>

### *(iv) Methodology Revisited*

Critical theory can provide extremely useful tools for political philosophers. Political philosophers sometimes seem to think critical theory's methodology somehow less 'rigorous' than philosophy's dominant methodology – perhaps because critical theorists abstract away less of the messiness of real life, meaning that their arguments are not as easily condensed into neat linear premises, implications, and conclusions.<sup>674</sup> Though this messiness may foreclose clinically linear arguments, I have attempted to show how carefully we must assess the political effects of paring down the world to this terse, idealised elegance. Critical theoretical approaches have increasingly begun to filter into political philosophical work – particularly work on gender and race.<sup>675</sup> These approaches can bear fruit applied more widely and, in particular, to traditional political philosophical topics like that of distributive justice.

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<sup>672</sup> See Fraser (2014: 63).

<sup>673</sup> Fraser *et al.* (2018) argue that we are currently living through crises of reproduction as well as of nature.

<sup>674</sup> Even those working on the boundaries of critical theory and political philosophy sometimes feed this trope. For example, Mills (2014: 87) claims that the metaphysician Sally Haslanger's version of ideology critique contains 'far greater theoretical sophistication' than that of her Marxist and feminist predecessors; though I agree that Haslanger's work is wonderful, this pronouncement is puzzling given how deeply indebted she is to these schools of thought.

<sup>675</sup> E.g. Chambers (2010); Haslanger (2012e). Though these approaches have long had a presence within the discipline (e.g. Bartky 1988; Young 2011a).

## Conclusion

*In his justification for the series, commissioning editor Klein explained that the BBC-sponsored research had discovered that the deepest dissatisfaction felt by white working class Britain stemmed from their sense of betrayal by New Labour. Despite this finding, the series underlines the more sensational dynamics of race as the key to understanding their disillusionment. – Vron Ware, on the BBC's 'White Season'*<sup>676</sup>

Our ability to theorise economic-distributive issues matters. Otherwise, it is all too easy to frame class-based anger as stemming from crises of threatened masculinity and race-based resentment. This deflects attention from classed injustice and puts women and communities of colour in increased danger. Politicians have been continually busting the supposed 'taboo' of having racially-loaded conversations about the 'problem' of immigration for over a decade now, and we are living through the consequences: a stoking up of racism and a hardening of nationalism while economic inequalities stagnate and public services struggle.<sup>677</sup> Given this, our ability to theorise economic-distributive issues in ways that recognise the intersections of race, class, and gender matters enormously.

There are reasons to think that this ability will become yet more important as ecological crises intensify. If stable and affordable food supplies, clean water, and safe places to live become increasingly unreliable, the temptation to exclude

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<sup>676</sup> Ware (2008).

<sup>677</sup> Foucault (2012b) argues that though we assume discussion of sexuality to be taboo in our society, this supposed taboo actually functions to *intensify, multiply, and reorient* discussions of sex and sexuality. A similar process has been at work within racially-laden discourses about immigration: politicians begin by asserting that it has become taboo to speak about immigration concerns (e.g. Yvette Cooper {2013}; Andy Burnham {Hutt 2010}; David Cameron {2011a}). The breaking of this supposed taboo casts them as 'straight-talking' as they go on to legitimise the idea that one of the major political problems we face is that of out-of-control immigration threatening our culture, jobs, and public services.



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racialised populations from access to these resources, to free-ride on exploitative gendered and classed labour practices, and to double-down on raced, classed, and gendered legitimations of these exclusions and devaluations will likely only increase. This makes intersectional work on distributive justice critical.

Yet distributive theorising has been dominated (within political philosophy) by the supposed normative significance of individual choice and (within certain strands of critical theory) by problematic economy-culture dualisms. The silver lining of political ruptures like Brexit and Trump must be the room they open for different thinking on the issues which fuelled them – issues like race, gender, class, national belonging, and the economy.

Recently, Satnam Virdee encouraged left social movements to ‘wilfully entangle demands for economic justice with antiracism’ (and, I would add, feminism).<sup>678</sup> I hope to have contributed to the theoretical resources needed for such an entangling. Within political philosophy, distributive justice can seem like an outdated topic – a game where most of the major moves happened decades ago. This could not be further from the truth: non-ideal work on distributive justice must be an important part of egalitarian political philosophy if we are to speak to our current political impasse.

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<sup>678</sup> Virdee (2019: 3).

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